THE PILLAR IN THE NIGHT

BY THE AUTHOR OF
"MORNING AND NIGHT WATCHES"

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THE PILLAR IN THE NIGHT.

"*And the Lord went before them . . . by night in a Pillar of Fire, to give them light. . . . The Pillar of Fire by night departed not from before the people.*"—Exod. xiii. 21, 22.

THE

PILLAR IN THE NIGHT

BY

REV. J. R. MACDUFF, D.D.

AUTHOR OF "MORNING AND NIGHT WATCHES,"
"BOW IN THE CLOUD," ETC.

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TO

THE VERY REV. A. H. CHARTERIS, D.D.,

MODERATOR OF THE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND,

PROFESSOR OF

BIBLICAL CRITICISM IN THE UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH,

AND ONE OF HER MAJESTY'S CHAPLAINS,

THE BELOVED AND HONOURED FRIEND OF LONG YEARS,

THIS VOLUME

IS DEDICATED.

PREFACE.

THIS book is intended as a companion to the author's *Bow in the Cloud.*

Like the other, though purposely in a more extended shape, its pages are addressed to those in affliction. There is a touching tradition, to which he has elsewhere referred, regarding the Jewish Temple of old, that it had a gateway reserved exclusively for mourners. Such is the present volume. It opens up a pathway to God's sanctuary trodden by the footsteps of sorrow. It is sacred to dimmed eyes, and broken hearts, and tender memories. Moreover, though not exclusively, it is the wide family of the *bereaved* the writer has chiefly in view.

A few words on the title.

Nothing is more impressive in the desert journeys of the Israelites, than the miraculous moving Pillar which preceded them. That Pillar, as they advanced by day, took the form of a

column: when they halted, it spread itself over the tabernacle as a canopy of cloud. It was nothing else than the Shekinah—the visible symbol of the Divine Presence. It resolved itself into a flaming fire by night; an equally glorious emblem, under the star-lit vault of heaven, of Jehovah's guidance. "Gathering up its luminous folds," it led the sacramental host in silence along plateau and valley. Rising high, it was seen far and wide by the vast caravan: the gleam—the lurid coruscation—now lighting up the mysterious cliffs of the Mount of God, now projected through wastes of sand to the rim of the horizon, creating, athwart leagues of desert, an illuminated golden pathway. It had even a gracious natural use. As the day-cloud tempered the tremulous palpitating heat, screening from the glare of sunlight, —"the sun shall not smite thee by day,"—so the holy fire, kindled at the setting in of darkness, helped to disperse the damps and chill dews of night. Regarding both aspects of the one Pillar, it could be said, in the words of the Book of Proverbs, "When thou goest it shall lead thee: when thou sleepest it shall keep thee: and when thou awakest it shall talk with thee" (Prov. vi. 22).

The flaming column, moreover, it may not be out of place to note, continued its significant lessons in the Gospel age. In the anniversary

Jewish festival, the Feast of Tabernacles, when at each returning autumn in Palestine the wilderness journeyings were commemorated, the impressive symbol was not forgotten. During the day, the leafy encampments (*Succoth*) on the Mount of Olives and in the environs of Jerusalem, rehearsed the old nomad life with its "dwelling in tents." After the hour of sunset, the torches carried by the crowd; above all, the gigantic candelabra, lighted high on the Temple platform, and which illuminated hill and valley, terraced vineyard and olive grove, as well as court and cloister, recalled the glow of "the Pillar in the night": while, at the same great gathering, Christ, with purposed allusion, revealed Himself as the true Pillar of Fire—"*I am the Light of the world*" (John viii. 12). With Israel, the mystic type left its varied memories, by the Red Sea, Migdol, Elim, Marah, Rephidim, Horeb; till, Jordan reached, its light was needed no more. So is it associated still, in a deeper spiritual sense, with all the diverse experiences of "the pilgrims of the night." Could there possibly be a more significant emblem of God's constant presence, His protecting care and love, His sympathy specially in the deep gloom of bereavement? When human helps are gone, when moon and stars, human luminaries and satellites have paled in the firmament, and the

way is pursued in loneliness and darkness, He lights a Pharos in "the sea of the desert." A Pillar, gleaming with ruby splendour appears, respecting which this is the Divine legend on the lips of many a child of sorrow (the "DUX, LUX" of our title-page)—"*He LED them all the night with a LIGHT of fire.*"

Yes, the Jehovah of the Pillar which moved along the Sinai route, keeps nightly vigil over His Israel still; and it is not in one trial, but in all trials, —"Thy faithfulness (marginal rendering) *in the nights*" (Psalm xcii. 2). "He that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep." He makes the night of pain and separation and death luminous. "The great and terrible wilderness" becomes a *Peniel*; so that the experience of His people is often that of a kindred patriarch-sufferer, "By His light I walked through darkness" (Job xxix. 3), or, of another, "If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me, even the night shall be light about me" (Psalm cxxxix. 11). Of how many among the white-robed multitude above, who have "come out of great tribulation,"—those who have done with the desert and crossed the typical Jordan,—may it be said, in the remembrance of the fiery Pillar, "It gave light by night to these!" (Exod. xiv. 20). Happy, O Israel, of all ages, amid the awful sanctities of sorrow, to be bathed in that "excel-

lent glory"; to love God's own beacon, gleaming with love and promise, illuminating your darkened way, till you reach the land where, in His full vision and fruition, symbol is unneeded: for "there shall be no night there"; "The Lord shall be thine everlasting light, and the days of thy mourning shall be ended" (Isa. lx. 20).

Pause, meanwhile, under the radiance of the Pillar, and make it your prayer—"If Thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence." Hear the gracious response, "My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest" (Exod. xxxiii. 14, 15). Affliction has ever been the gracious season for revival, quickening, restoration. Remember, in the case of the Hebrew host, it was when the night and its shadows were gathering, that the invocation—the sweet *Angelus* of the desert—was heard (may it have its responsive meaning in the case of many): "*Return*, O Lord, unto the many thousands of Israel!" And when the last night of the journey arrives, may it be ours, under the gleam of the Pillar, to sing in the retrospect the refrain of the great Psalm of the Exodus: "*To Him which led His people through the wilderness:* for His mercy endureth for ever!"

The Meditations which follow are thirty-one in number, so as to be used, if thus desired, for each day of the month. They have no systematic plan,

connection, or sequence. They are not linked together consecutively—each is independent of what precedes or follows. Should similar thought here and there be repeated, those for whom the book is written will understand and condone what from the nature of the theme is unavoidable.

"The path of life we walk to-day
Is strange as that the Hebrews trod;
We need the shadowing rock, as they,—
We need like them the cloud of God.

"God send His Angels, Cloud and Fire,
To lead us o'er the desert sand;
God give our hearts their long desire,
And bring us to the Promised Land!"

Whittier's "El Ghor."

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FIRST DAY.

THE COMFORTER AND HIS COMFORTS.

"The Lord went before them by night in a pillar of fire."

'Comfort ye, comfort ye My people, saith your God. . . . The voice of one that crieth, Prepare ye in the wilderness the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a high way for our God. . . And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed."—Isa. xl. 1, 3, 5 (R.V.).

"I, even I, am He that comforteth you."—Isa. li. 12.

"I have surely seen the affliction of My people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry :—for I know their sorrows; and I am come down to deliver them."—Exod. iii. 7, 8.

THOUGH so far an echo of our prefatory words, this gleam of the Fiery Pillar may well occupy the opening meditation. What, in the darkest hour of trial, is so inspiring and solacing as the simple but sublime thought of *the Divine Presence*? God nigh to us, nigh to us continually; the Pillar emitting no fitful intermittent flame, but "*all the night* with a light of fire." He whom that light symbolised and enshrined, not only ordering our afflictions, but, in them all, identifying Himself with His people in their time of trouble. "I know their sorrows,"—"I am come down to deliver them," were words spoken on the threshold of the Exodus. Though they actually preceded the manifestation of the Cloud, we may well regard them as the key-note to the entire night-song of pilgrim Israel. The same assurance is thus expanded by a later Psalmist: "When Israel went out of Egypt, the house of Jacob from a people of strange language, Judah was His sanctuary and Israel His dominion." He proceeds to tell how the Fiery Pillar was then kindled,—kindled at the Red

Sea, conducting through all the immensity of the wild desert and its darkness, till they reached the border river :—"The SEA saw it and fled, JORDAN was driven back." In closing the same historic hymn, he renews the theme, as he asks the reason of this opening and closing,—rather this continuous miracle. It is "the *presence* of the Lord—the *presence* of the God of Jacob" (Psalm cxiv. 1, 2, 3, 7). The Jehovah of the burning bush—the Jehovah of the burning column—remained their Divine Consoler and Guide. Night-watch after night-watch the Pillar seemed to flash out the calming assurance, "*I, even I, am He that comforteth you!*"

Afflicted one! this is still the gracious gleam in your deepest night of trial, "I have seen your affliction." Israel's God and His realised nearness is the supreme consolation. Human sympathy is soothing: often precious,—indispensable. But it has its limitations, we may even say its shortcomings. There are times when no earthly comforter can meet your case or fathom the aching voids of your heart. Words of gushing condolence, doubtless well intended, are often mistimed, an intrusion on the sacredness of sorrow. Great afflictions are too deep to be reached by words. Milton's "mute expressive silence" is generally the best way of dealing with such; and it is the Divine

way. You remember how He who was Himself the Prince of Sufferers,—who understood all the finer feelings and intuitions of the soul — the divinely sympathetic Brother-Man, dealt in a recorded hour of bereavement? He takes His disciples aside from the crowd. "Come," said He, on hearing of the death of the Baptist, "Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest awhile" (Mark vi. 31). He knew, with discriminating tenderness, that sorrow often most appreciates the shade; the responsive sigh, the pensive unspoken look; the grasp of the hand, the unbidden tear,—away from "the minstrels making a noise" (Matt. ix. 23), the conventionalisms of consolation. True are the poet's words to his "Friend on the death of his Sister":—

> "With silence only as their benediction,
> God's Angels come;
> Where, in the shadow of a great affliction
> The Soul sits dumb."

Reader, seek thus, in your hour of loneliness and sadness, to stand amid these "silences of heaven," and hear the whisper of love from Him who is the Author and Sender of your trial, and who best comprehends its severity: "Fear thou not, for *I am with thee.* Be not dismayed" (marg.: Look not around thee), "for *I am thy God*" (Isa. xli. 10). A writer tells us that the old motto of

the Fatherland is still preserved in United Germany. It may be seen as a heraldic device, sometimes graven on shrine or portal, or emblazoned on military standard, or heard as a war-cry amid the thunders of battle. It is the same which forms the chief watchword, the strength and support of the Christian in his "great fight of afflictions"—*Gott mit uns* ("God is with us").

Yet, alas! despite of this, the soaring wings of faith and trust *will* at times droop: the old reclaiming word may, and doubtless will intrude—"If the Lord be with us, why then is all this befallen us?" (Judges vi. 13). There is no response, no solace, save in the simple words of acquiescence—"Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Thy sight!" (Matt. xi. 26). Trial ever has been, and ever will be, His method of parental dealing. He employs it as the ballast of the soul:—it steadies the ship. The angels of affliction conduct "through the wilderness." Their herald-cry is in the words of one of our motto-verses—"Prepare ye *the way of the Lord*, make straight *in the desert* a high way for our God" (Isa. xl. 3). *The Desert:* He calls us, as He did Philip of old, from beautiful Samaria, with its groves and gardens, its rippling streams and healthful breezes,—it may be from our appointed human work, imperious claims and urgent responsibilities,—to Gaza, *which is desert* (Acts

viii. 26). The way to the Kingdom is by the way of the Cross : the *Via Dolorosa* leads to the *Via Sacra*. It is he "going forth *weeping*, bearing precious seed," who at last is rewarded with the harvest *reaping* and the harvest-home (Psalm cxxvi. 6). Those who have travelled amid the sandy wastes and scant herbage of the Pillar-route know well that the dew falls thickest (most drenching) after a day of burning heat. The dews of the Spirit's grace fall most copiously after the heat of fiery trial. It is then the promise of the Divine Comforter is made good, "I will be as the dew unto Israel" (Hosea xiv. 5). "When we walked," says Richter, "under the forest aisles in summer, the foliage hid from us God's sweet skies. But it was only when the desolating winds of winter had made the branches bare, that through those very black and naked boughs we could all the better discern God's eternal guiding star." It is the midnight sea, ploughed by the keel of trial, in which a brighter and better than natural phosphorescence is manifested. In that most beautiful of inspired idylls, the Bride of the Song is represented as saying, "By *night* I sought Him whom my soul loveth" (Sol. Song. iii. 1).

"The Pillar in the night" of our volume was light *in a cloud*: a lustrous gleam in a cloudy envelope or setting. It is said of God, "He

maketh the clouds His chariot" (Psalm civ. 3). "A great cloud *with the fire* infolding itself" (Ezek. i. 4). It is for us, therefore, to feel assured, that the clouds of life, often so gloomy, are in reality "the chariots of God." This thought inspires a living poet's invocation :—

"Oh, make my clouds Thy chariots; so shall I learn to see
That the mist that dims the glory is itself a light from Thee;
For the shadows of the wilderness to me shall sing aloud,
When I find Thy nearest coming in the advent of a cloud."
Sacred Songs.

I may close this meditation with two thoughts regarding the Divine Comforter and His comforts.

(1) He is an *unchanging* Comforter. He survives all trials, all vicissitudes. He is the living Fountain that remains ever fresh, ever flowing, *over*-flowing, when other surroundings are crumbling, or have crumbled to decay. Our oldest and best writer of historical romance speaks thus of a Well, which in a former century was close by one of the ancestral palaces of England : "This fountain of old memory had been once adorned with architectural ornaments in the style of the sixteenth century. All these were now wasted and overthrown, and existed only as moss-covered ruins : while the living spring continued to furnish its daily treasures, gushing out amid disjointed stones, and bubbling through fragments of ancient

sculpture." In a far higher, diviner sense is this typical of the true "Well of Water springing up unto everlasting life." "*They* shall perish, but *Thou* remainest." Lover and friend may be put far from you and your acquaintance into darkness: the face and the place that once knew you may know you no more. "They truly were many, because they were not suffered to continue by reason of death." But the voice steals down from the lips of Him who is changeless among the changeable, "I am He that liveth and was dead: and behold I am alive for evermore!" Go, weave this word-pattern in your web of sorrow, "My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart and my portion *for ever*" (Psalm lxxiii. 26). "*I, even I, am He that comforteth you.*"

(2) My second thought is, that He is the *alone* Comforter.

These are the words of the great Leader of the Hebrew host: "Did ever people hear the voice of God speaking out of the midst of the fire, as thou hast heard? . . . Know that the Lord He is God; there is none else beside Him" (Deut. iv. 33, 35). "None else" can comfort. It is the avowal of every child of trial—"In the multitude of the sorrows that I had in my heart, Thy comforts (alone) have refreshed my soul" (Psalm xciv. 19, Prayer Book version). These comforts are *His*

exclusive anodynes. The world, with all its garish blessings and fascinations, cannot give them. The world with all its tribulations cannot take them away. Philosophy and the schools can yield no such solvent. Affliction baffles the most recondite earthly forces and panaceas. In these our days there is many an intellectual triumph to be recorded. All hearts may well pulsate with pride as we hear of the ever-increasing victories in the realm of science. Honour to its experts and votaries:—they may well be laurel-crowned. But what can science, in the zenith of her achievements, do for us amid the deepening floods of trial? With all her spoils and trophies can, she utter the longed-for assuring word, "When thou passest through the waters I will be with thee"? (Isa. xliii. 2). In the darkest hour of all, what response has she to give to the Prophet's anxious question "How wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?" (Jer. xii. 5). There is but One who can say, "Through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee," "I will restore comforts unto him and to his mourners" (Isa. lvii. 18). "Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of Thy waterspouts; all Thy waves and Thy billows are gone over me. *Yet the Lord* will command His lovingkindness in the daytime, and in the night His song shall be with me, and my prayer unto the God of my life" (Psalm xlii. 7, 8).

As the Pillar of the desert was formed of *one* isolated column or cloud, with no other to support it, so is He all-sufficient in Himself: wiser than all others, kinder than all others, independent of all others. Though it may be no more than a legend,—one amid many such told of in the desert march and in connection with the Pillar-cloud, it may here be recalled. It was on the occasion of the death of Aaron. Moses was commanded to announce to his loved brother that he was about to die. In doing so (thus runs the Jewish tradition) the great leader and lawgiver let fall many tears. Ascending Mount Nebo together, Moses still weeping all the way, they came at last to a large cavern in the rock, where a couch with funeral trappings was prepared and ready. Aaron was calm and composed; Moses still wept sorely. "Why, Moses," said the other, "art thou so in tears?" "Because," was the reply, "when our sister Miriam died, I had thee to be with me in the hour of death. Now, when that comes I shall die alone." "Nay, brother, not alone: Jehovah will be with thee. He will smooth thy dying pillow. He will close thine eyes, and be better unto thee than all mourners and funeral rites. *God* shall be in the place of brother or sister." And the legend thus touchingly closes, "the word of Aaron came true."

"All men forsook me," was the plaint of St.

Paul, in the Mamertine dungeon, with a violent death before him,—"*Notwithstanding, the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me*" (2 Tim. iv. 16, 17). "Can the children of the bridechamber mourn, so long as the Bridegroom is *with them*?" He, alone, as in the case of His apostle, can relax the galling chain, brighten the lonely prison and the lonely spirit: He alone can wipe the tear-dimmed eye. He alone understands the sob of a broken heart—"I *am* bereaved!" (Gen. xliii. 14). Think of Him, rejoice in Him, as what the old divines call "the upmaking Portion,"—all sufficient from centre to circumference; no phantasm, but a living, loving, Divine Personality: "The Father of mercies and the God of *all comfort*" (2 Cor. i. 3). "*I, even I, am He that comforteth you.*"

Believe it, ye sufferers. Believe that trial is the thunder-cloud with a rainbow often sleeping in its depths: that it is the door opening to the inner chamber where we are invited to touch the King's golden sceptre. A quaint writer says, "He demands tribute-money from us; and Affliction is His 'Receipt of Custom.'" "Tarry ye here," are the words still of the suffering Master. Yes, tarry under the olive shade of your Gethsemane, whatever it is, and "watch with *Me*." Thus will your severest sorrows endear to you the nearness and presence of Him of whom alone it can be said, from

His own deep heartfelt experience—"In all their afflictions He was afflicted!"

And then, trust this all-comforting God *for the future*. He will read, in His own good time and way, the typical parable of our present volume. To quote the familiar words of the poet:—

"By day, along the astonished lands
The cloudy pillar glided slow;
By night, Arabia's crimsoned sands
Returned the fiery column's glow.

* * * * *

"And oh, when stoops o'er pilgrim-path,
In shade and storm the frequent night,
Be thou long-suffering, slow to wrath,
A burning and a shining light!"

Yes, the time will undoubtedly come when "in Thy light we shall see light." The afflictions of the present resemble what the fissures and unsightly gashes were to the Israelites when encamped beneath the savage cliffs of Sinai. Their gloom and terror and mystery were all gone when beheld at the far distance in the flush of evening. So, too, will your experiences of trial be, when seen bathed in the glory of unsetting suns. What now is like the tolling of funeral bells will then appear rather to have been preparatory and preparation-chimes, ringing in the festal worshippers to the Church of the glorified. No purpose of

God regarding you will remain unfulfilled,—no flower uncrowned with blossom.

Lord! let nothing dim the brightness of the Pillar, in the midst of present environing gloom! Let that gloom rather inspire me with greater ardour of heart and lip to pray, "I beseech Thee, show me *Thy glory*!" Turn my night of weeping into a morning of joy. Let me hear the Prophet's refrain—the sweet promise of Thy love,—as a voice crying in the wilderness :—

"COMFORT YE, COMFORT YE MY PEOPLE SAITH YOUR GOD."

SECOND DAY.

DIVINE SOVEREIGNTY.

"The Lord went before them by night in a pillar of fire."

"At the commandment of the Lord they rested in the tents, and at the commandment of the Lord they journeyed."—NUMB. xi. 23.

IN the season of desolating bereavement no thought is more needed to comfort and sustain than that of *the Divine Sovereignty.*

Does affliction spring from the dust and trouble from the ground? Are life and death regulated by nothing better than accident and chance? Are we at the mercy of second causes? Could suffering couches, sick-beds, and death-beds, have been averted by human prevision? *Does God reign?* or is this world abandoned to self-rule? At best, if Deity be acknowledged, is He only some abstract, arbitrary Impersonal Force, withdrawn in the sublime solitudes of space; as little conversant and sympathetic, as the fabled gods of Olympus were, with the wants and trials of His people? Or what is worse, "the God of thunderbolts"; inexorable, stern, and vengeful, as were the Involuti of the old Etruscans, or Kali and Vishnu of the Hindoos?

Though dismissing the last with its repellent terrorism, it is verily not easy, at times, to rise, even in the case of those who own the Divine Fatherhood, above the tyranny of secondary agencies. The Sovereignty of the Supreme Con-

troller is often confronted with human culpability. '"If such and such only had been done. An oar, a floating spar, a grip of the hand, would in time have saved my child!" Timeous precaution,—a yard farther apart, would have averted the lightning stroke, or escaped the precipice. An improvised rope, where the fire-escape was absent, would have prevented the most dread of catastrophes:—"The Lord doth not see, neither doth the God of Israel regard." "Surely my way is hid from the Lord, and my judgment is passed over from my God!" If not, why these unsuccoured prayers? Why, to these impassioned pleadings, is the earth as brass and the heaven as iron? Does Jehovah, or the twin sceptres of Destiny and Fate, rule the Universe? "Wherefore doth the Lord our God all these things unto us?" (Jer. v. 19).'

Hush this covert or avowed atheism. "*The Lord reigneth;* let the earth be glad" (Psalm xcvii. 1). "Who knoweth not, in all these things, that the hand of the Lord hath wrought this?" (Job xii. 9). Never was the pillar of the desert a truer symbolic pledge than here. God goes before His people of every age "all the night with a light of fire." This world may, indeed, appropriately be called, as was the broad field at Shechem in a future age where Abimelech was crowned King—"the plain of the Pillar" (Judges ix. 6). There flashes far and wide,

farthest and widest in the deep midnight of trial, the gleam of the Divine Sovereignty. This is the legend for every human soul: it forms the history of Pilgrim-Israel now as of old—"And the Ark of the covenant of the Lord went before them to seek out a resting place for them" (Numb. x. 33). That Ark moved at the bidding neither of earthly leader nor priest. Its every movement was determined by the Divine Shepherd of Israel Himself—"the Angel of His Presence." In the words of our motto-verse, "At the commandment of the Lord they rested in the tents, and at the commandment of the Lord they journeyed" (Numb. ix. 23).

God's providences, to take a long-subsequent incident from one of our own centuries, are like the land-birds which hovered over the vessel of Columbus when he was all uncertain as to his track. "Let us follow them in their course," said his seamen. The explorer hearkened to the wise counsel. Ere long the shore was hailed and the anchorage of a new world secured. There is no half-way truth,—we must own and follow the guiding Pillar; and recognise, step by step, encampment after encampment, the presence of the All-seeing:—"Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid Thine hand upon me" (Psalm cxxxix. 5). The old Patriarch, in that same Arabian desert, grasped and antedated a true Christian philosophy,

when he turned away from all devil-born suggestions of second causes,—simoom and sandstorm, whirlwind and lightning, flash of Sabæan sword and spear. Gazing devoutly out of his darkness, he owned alone the dealings and decrees of a Personal God. His "Benedicite" has been the stay as well as the rebuke of many a sufferer under a brighter dispensation:—"The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken" (Job i. 21). "Behold *He* taketh away, who can hinder Him? Who will say unto Him, What doest Thou?" (Job ix. 12). "He knoweth the way that I take" (Job xxiii. 10).

Yes, stricken one! be assured this is the rudimental truth in theology, the foundation-article in the creed of the afflicted—"Himself hath done it" (Isa. xxxviii. 15). "*Jehovah Shammai!*" (The Lord is there). Make it your endeavour—your prayer, to listen first, and before all else, to the Voice from the Column which says,—"*I* have appointed that trial, these hours of agonising suspense, that pining sickness, that wasted body, that impaired mind, that early grave. Think of Me too in your minutest sorrows and their accompaniments. Think of Me, not as a potential agency occupied only with great things and momentous events; condescending alone to guide the solemn march of stars or the revolution of kingdoms: think of Me, rather, as fixing the dew-drop on the stem,

pencilling the unseen flower of the desert, sculpturing the snow-wreath, controlling the undulation of the waves—watching the drop of every leaf in the forest. Things have a relative proportion and magnitude in the eye of man. They are called large and small. There are no such terms in the Divine vocabulary. "His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and His dominion endureth to all generations. (Yet) the Lord upholdeth all that fall, and raiseth up all those that be bowed down" (Psalm cxlv. 14). He feeds the young ravens when they cry. "*He* doeth according to His will in the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth, and none can stay His hand" (Dan. iv. 35). "Cast thy burden *He hath given thee* (R.V.) on the Lord" (Psalm lv. 22). Believe, as very essential to your present comfort, that there can be no minimising of this Divine power and control. Seek to say with the Minstrel King in His hour of great sorrow, "I will be dumb, I will open not my mouth, because THOU didst it." Seek that the too merited reproach against the old Hebrew host in the desert may not be yours—"Yet in this thing ye did not believe the Lord your God, who went before you in the way, to seek you out a place to pitch your tents in, in fire by night, to shew you by what way you should go" (Deut. i. 33). The voice from the Pillar may

at times be mysterious : it may be heard in thunder-tones ; but it is God's voice notwithstanding. Ay, and be assured, there is a Divine necessity for it. It may be in the *shadow* of His hand that He hides us (Isa. xlix. 2). But He knows us better, He loves us better, than to leave us unchastened and unchallenged. He sees it would not be well if our path lay all through the sunlight of Beulah. We can confide in His wisdom and power, His grace and love,—that He will keep us no longer in the furnace than is absolutely needful. He who lighted it, is seated by, tempering the fury of the flames.

The main lesson of this meditation ought to be that of the former,—child-like, unwavering *trust* in the Great Supreme. Beware of misinterpreting His dealings ; even when teaching by stern lessons. Much is now in a foreign tongue. All will be translated in heaven. Present experiences of "sorrow" will be rendered into "memories of His great goodness."

> "God can read it ; we must wait ;
> Wait until He teach the mystery ;
> Then the wisdom-woven history
> Faith shall read and love translate."

"*He for our profit*" will then at least be the unhesitating avowal. "He that hath *wrought* us for the selfsame thing is God" (2 Cor. v. 5). The

King's daughter, all glorious within, will, through the endless ages, be adorned in "her clothing of *wrought* gold" (Psalm xlv. 13). Even now we can exult in the assurance that these same angels of affliction spoken of in our last, marshalled and commissioned by the Lord of Hosts, are, on the loom of sorrow, "*working* for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory!"

Reader, you may thus well proceed under the solemn gleam and guidance of your Pillar, rejoicing that every turn in the desert is known to God, that in night watches of profoundest gloom you are under the sleepless eye of Israel's unslumbering Shepherd. May your experience be, "By His light I walked in darkness." Let patience, and devout recognition of His sovereign hand, be known and read of all men. Try, that the broken alabaster vase may fill the whole home of your influence with its fragrance. So that of others who, in the endurance of similar trials, have failed fully to own the Divine appointment, it may be said, "They have heard that Thou, Lord, art in the midst of this people: for Thou, Lord, art seen face to face; and Thy cloud standeth over them:

AND THOU GOEST BEFORE THEM IN A PILLAR OF CLOUD BY DAY, AND IN A PILLAR OF FIRE BY NIGHT."

THIRD DAY.

EARLY DEATH.

"The Lord went before them by night in a pillar of fire."

"Her sun is gone down while it was yet day."—JER. xv. 9.

"Taken away from the evil to come."—ISA. lvii. 1.

THERE are few trials among the varied phases of affliction more mysterious and overwhelming than that of *early death.* The many thus bereft turn with longing, it is to be feared, too often, with vain solicitude, to the Pillar for light, guidance, comfort. Their hearts are saddened,—

> "For faded dreams and blighted hopes of youth,
> For goals just reached and then for ever lost,
> For sweet illusions swept aside by truth,
> Young visions vanished, dearest wishes crost."

Mysterious indeed. We can understand the autumn foliage—leaves golden with age dropping to the ground. It is the decay of Nature. We look for nothing else. They had been nurtured in spring, fanned by its balmy zephyrs; they had been matured by summer's suns. And now that the waning year asserts its rights, they have only fulfilled their appointed destiny, and fall as they are touched by the poet's "fiery finger."

But what of the tender sapling that has hardly taken on the verdant mantle of the opening season,

when it is snapped in twain by the tempest, its leaves strewing the sward or swept down the brook? All the stranger when other trees, its compeers, are spared, bursting in resurrection foliage, or made perches for a chorus of summer song? It is the sweep of the scythe amid the early dews of life. It is the crash of the woodman's axe, not on the mouldering trunk but on the vigorous scion of the forest. We can understand the old vessel, like the *Temeraire* of a great Painter, wending its slow, funereal way to its last resting-place in the harbour, its fight of "battle and breeze" over, to sleep now undisturbed on its shadows. But what of the ship which, after the ring of ten thousand hammers, has just been launched on its new element, its gay pennons fluttering, the crowd of onlookers forecasting her long future, and the many ports that will "exult in the gleam of her mast?" The sudden breath of the tempest overtakes. After a few brave buffetings she becomes a shattered wreck; the fatal reef has scattered her beams on the waters. Emblem of life prematurely taken: garnered stores of promise perished in life's prime!

We can understand the pathetic twilight followed by the sun sinking in bars of gold in the western sky. We can understand this in its figurative meaning as applied to human existence with the

duties and responsibilities of long decades faithfully discharged :—

> "Nobly thy course is run,
> Splendour is round it:
> Bravely thy fight is won,
> Victory crowned it.
> In the high warfare
> Of heaven grown hoary,
> Thou'rt gone like the summer sun
> Shrouded in glory."

But what of eclipse before reaching the meridian? What of the sun briefly and touchingly spoken of in the words which head our meditation—"going down while it was yet day,"—the promise of forenoon and midday and pensive evening belied,—the satellite of our being missed from its familiar orbit, the place that once knew it knowing it no more? "We see," says a writer, "a thousand reasons why the cherished one ought to live: not one reason why he should die" (Eliot). "The death of a young man," says Dean Vaughan, on an exceptionally solemn occasion, ever fresh in the nation's remembrance, "is always pathetic. So much that is immature behind, so much that is unaccomplished before him,—it is a picture (on its earthly side) of mere disappointment. If we did not believe in the twelve hours of each man's day, in the reckoning of One with whom months and years are names unknown, we should indeed misgive ourselves as

we look on, and accuse the stroke of death as inconsiderate, unfeeling, unkind. . . . When we think what was apparently before him, . . . what of influence, what of opportunity, . . . we cannot but weep over so much of baffled hope, of broken promise, of buried possibility!" "Sad," are the words of another, who was as pure and lovable a soul as he was a supreme and gifted genius,—"Sad," says Gustave Doré, writing to a bereaved parent, "to see the one who has become our friend, and reciprocates the care and affection we have lavished upon him, pass from us at the moment when the Book of Earth was opening upon his sight" (*Life*, p. 501). "Take *now* thy Son, thine only Son, Isaac, whom thou lovest."

"The autumn winds rushing
Waft the leaves that are searest;
But our flower was in flushing
When blighting was nearest!"

Scott.

"Lycidas is dead, dead ere his prime,
Young Lycidas, and hath not left his peer."

Milton.

There is a touching pathos in one of the last lyrics of "Owen Meredith" taken from his "*Marah*":—

"Unlit by you, no light have I,
A fainting lamp that's fed by none!
The earth seems left without a sky,
The sky without a sun.

"Come back! come back! And with you bring
All that with you is gone away;
Warmth, light, life, love, and everything
That stays but where you stay."

If the Earth-bower of our earthly happiness has thus been stripped "ere the sun has risen," can we, dare we, look for any possible dewdrops of comfort lingering on the prostrate leaves?—

Yes, in the midst of these blighted hopes, shattered wrecks, vanished suns, life's fondest ideals unfulfilled, there are, O suffering one! when the healing hand of time will permit you calmly to ponder the dealings of God, gracious *mitigations* at all events in your trial, if you fail to accord to them the more pronounced epithet of consolations. Your future may truly be spoken of as "night"—night in the desert, night with its dearest star, its "morning-star," expunged from the sky. But He who has alike brought you into the night and the wilderness has some gracious gleams from His Pillar-cloud.

Turn, first of all, to the companion verse above. Your loved one is "*taken away from the evil to come.*" God only knows what these evils might have been: what clouds may have been brooding over that fair horizon. *You* are unable to anticipate the future. You have eyes only to see a life of rare promise terminated, and a future of

noble fulfilment shrouded in death: a ministering angel all the wilderness through, summoned from your side, to leave you alone, with the dirge on your lips—"How is the staff broken and the beautiful rod!" "I will go down into the grave unto my son mourning!" (Gen. xxxvii. 35). *You* have eyes only to see the skiff gliding amid gentle silver ripples, sure at last to sleep quietly in the distant lake; all its course a "melody of Song." God, the Omniscient One, the Loving One, knows otherwise. He foresees the jagged rocks and foaming eddies and rush of cataracts that would have beset the long voyage: or, leaving out figure,—the trials and sorrows, the buffeting temptations—it may even be the sad sins, that would make shipwreck of a loving life. He ordains in infinite wisdom that it is better to elude the suffering and peril by giving an early summons to an early crown. He takes the lamb, before the fleece is stained,—away from the possibilities of evil. The young warrior falls, *we* may think prematurely, in the fray—the laurel not having time even to be green on his brows; but the All-Wise knew of hazard and peril and environing evils hidden from our sight. He deemed it better, kinder, to give, all at once, "Peace beyond the strife," to add all at once a name to the better roll-call; to usher all at once ere the heart could

grieve, or the eye be dimmed, or the will falter, or the tempter triumph, amid the unceasing ministries of the glorified. Oh for faith in such an hour to say, "He hath done all things well"!—satisfied that our prayers are best answered and our longings best fulfilled, not in our way but in His. He willed it. Let us think, in connection with the missed member of the household, of the touching Jewish saying regarding Moses on Mount Nebo, "He died with the kiss of God!" Bereaved! in your *better* moments you will only be glad at the thought of your dear ones being far away from the hurricane and storm. Do not impeach your Heavenly Father's wisdom and love. Do not dwell on the mysterious muffling of the morning bells. The same verse which heads this chapter is followed by the significant clause—"They shall rest in their beds" (v. 2)—"For so He giveth His beloved SLEEP."

Another thought arising out of this: He or she—the departed one—is "not dead but sleepeth," "not dead but *liveth*!" Safely housed, safely home. You are the parent—the father or mother of a living child; not only "clean escaped," and beyond life's fitful fever, but "without fault before the throne." A blessed golden link, unknown before, is binding you to heaven. It is not life vanished like snowflakes on the ocean. It is not a lost one

or forgotten one:—no, never that. Rather, a jewel locked away in the casket of memory here,—a jewel to be found again and worn again in the meeting-place which will know no parting.

The earthly home and heritage have passed away, but in another very real sense the circle is unbroken. The departed are dowered with immortality. "He asked life of Thee, and Thou gavest him a long life, even for ever and ever" (Psalm xxi. 14). Many a bereft mother in Israel during the desert journey would be able to descry no light in the Pillar, seeing that the children she had expected to reach the land beyond Jordan had "died in the way": their promised Canaan was denied. Not so with you. You can pursue your pilgrim night-march with the assured hope, in the better Canaan, of indissoluble reunion. We know that not a few of the winged tribes around us have an instinct for summer climes. It would almost seem that some young spirits possessed this instinct of early migration for heaven as if it were more their abode to be there than here. But, knowing that such is their "resting-place," many parents can say rejoicing,—

"Our beautiful bird of light hath fled,—
Awhile it sat with folded wings,
Sang over us a few hoverings,
Then straightway into glory sped."

One other reflection, which we may link with the former, is a delightful one : that your lost child is in *the bloom of immortal youth*, or in the glory of *immortal manhood*. How many dear friends we can number as emigrants to the great Colony of the blest, departed in advanced life ! They died with the scars of battle upon them. Suffering had ploughed its furrows on their brow. An unkind world, with its cares and treacheries, its trials and temptations, had dimmed the once sunny face with the shadow of inveterate grief.

Your loved ones above never grow older. They are now with you in thought, and may we not well believe will be with you for ever, just as they played in the joy and innocence of childhood around your feet, or wandered with you along the sylvan paths of an early home.

> "When we lie becalmed by the tide of age,
> We hear, from the misty, hidden shore,
> The voice of *the children* gone before,
> Drawing the soul to its anchorage."

With the blissful confidence, in the case of your young departed, that the old identity of earth will not be destroyed but restored, you can exult through your tears, and say with an old weeper, as he mourned his withered flower, " I shall go to him " (2 Sam. xii. 23). They are beyond the

gates of the setting sun. But it is as children and youths they wait for you there—

"In dreams she grows not older
The lands far off among;
Though all the world wax colder,
Though all the songs be sung,
In dreams do we behold her
Still fair and kind and young."

Say, will not this assurance be also, *all* your earthly night, as a light of fire :—

"THY SUN SHALL NO MORE GO DOWN"?

FOURTH DAY.

MEMORIES.

"The Lord went before them by night in a pillar of fire."

"I will remember the works of the Lord: surely I will remember Thy wonders of old."—PSALM lxxvii. 11.

"I will remember Thee from the land of Jordan, and of the Hermonites, from the hill Mizar."—PSALM xlii. 6.

PSALM xviii. 1 to end.

THE psalmists of Israel loved with reiterated interest to recall the memories of the pillar of cloud and fire—the varied incidents in the desert march. "O God, when Thou wentest forth before Thy people, when Thou didst march through the wilderness: the earth shook, the heavens also dropped at the presence of God: even Sinai itself was moved at the presence of God, the God of Israel. Thou, O God, didst send a plentiful rain, whereby Thou didst confirm Thine inheritance when it was weary" (Psalm lxviii. 7, 8, 9). "Thy way is in the sea, and Thy path in the great waters, and Thy footsteps are not known. Thou leddest Thy people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron" (Psalm lxxvii. 19, 20). In seasons of trial a similar rehearsing in thought of our personal and individual histories cannot fail to be profitable, comforting, strengthening. This is peculiarly so in times of severe bereavement, when tempted, at first, in a spirit of hasty impatience, to say with the faithless, desponding Prophet, "It is better for me to die than to live."

In such a retrospect of the Divine doings and dealings, we may well contemplate the mingled faithfulness and love of Him who has "led us all our life long"; ever proving Himself true to His desert name and memorial, "The Lord God, merciful, gracious, long-suffering," "staying His rough wind in the day of His east wind," "tempering the wind to the shorn lamb," "in wrath remembering mercy." The rehearsal is surely calculated to moderate grief and foster trust and lowly submission; prompting, amid present sadder experiences, to say, "I will abundantly utter the memory of Thy great goodness and talk of Thy righteousness."

The second of our motto-verses, though it has no reference to the Arabian desert, contains a like re-traversing of the pilgrim way by the greatest of the psalmists. During his exile in the land of Gilead, his throne for the time lost, and deeper heart-sorrows gathering around him, he revives his fainting spirit and waning fortunes by recalling some never-to-be-forgotten experiences associated with help and deliverance,—some *Ebenezers*, we know not what they were, in the Valley of the Jordan, by the slopes of Hermon, or on "the hill Mizar." As he opened these windows of the soul each had some consolatory vista-view, each had some memory of blessing which inspired and reassured him for the future. And not in excep-

tional times and exigencies alone did he revive these pillar-gleams of a chequered life. When he reached the end of the wilderness, the brink of the border river,—in that most magnificent of all his Psalms, the 18th (as the superscription informs us in 2 Sam. xxii.), he unfolds his experiences at yet greater length. It is a record of reminiscences —gleam on gleam, flash on flash, of the Column of Fire, giving the God he served the praise of all: "*He* giveth strength"—"BY MY GOD." He embraces, too, even such minute providences as the rush through the enemy's troop, the snapping of the foeman's bow of steel, and the agile leap—the bounding over the fortress-wall which saved his life (vv. 22-30).

He does not indeed seek to disguise the occasional mystery of the Divine dealings, the glooms as well as the gleams of the Pillar. "He bowed the heavens also and came down, and darkness was under His feet" (Psalm xviii. 9). "He made darkness His secret place; His pavilion round about Him was dark waters and thick clouds of the sky" (v. 11). But taking a cumulative view of life, he sees no purpose of God in him unfulfilled. He owns redemptive ministries in every event of his existence, summing up the long catalogue with the attestation—"As for God, His way is perfect" (v. 30).

Observe yet further, in this great heart-hymn (the swan-song, written "when God had delivered David from all his enemies"), these rehearsals—records of the past—inspire him with confidence for the days that are yet to come, and for the final day of all. He reverently gazes on the wilderness pillar with its reflected lights, and resolves undeviatingly to follow.

Read its prologue: "I will love Thee, O Lord, my strength. The Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust: my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower (v. 1). . . . For Thou wilt light my candle: the Lord my God will enlighten my darkness" (v. 28).

Pilgrim of sorrow! in the midst of your present affliction, be what it may, seek to remember "*all* the way by which the Lord thy God hath led thee in the wilderness." Subscribe the roll of His suffering children with the wilderness testimony—"They called upon the Lord, and He answered them. *He spake unto them in the cloudy pillar*" (Psalm xcix. 6, 7). Mingled, with you, as with the kingly mourner of Zion, will must be, the retrospect. At this moment your past is overshadowed by the gloom of a present chastisement. That chastisement, moreover, may be of no ordinary severity. Is it bereavement—the removal of one

who seemed the indispensable companion of the pilgrimage, who worked with you, toiled with you, anticipated your every wish, abridged your every care, shared with quick sympathy your every sorrow and anxiety? Now the gushing fountain of joyous existence has ceased to flow. But if you are true in these memories, you will not fail, you cannot fail, even though standing amid the shadows of the Valley, to recall the "goodness and mercy that have followed you all the days of your life"; the hospices that have sheltered you; the ministering angels who once guarded you, though they have surrendered earthly trusts for higher ones. Even in the most chequered of human existences there is more of May than December; the darkest horizon is rainbow-spanned; the bright spots outnumber the dreary. No, no—deal faithfully with God and with yourself. Life is not one uniform leaden sky loaded with weeping clouds: life is not all music in the minor,—far less a crash of discord and dissonance. It is rather made up of blended harmonies. The key-note of its long *sonata* should rather be "Mercy rejoiceth over judgment." Take one solace among a hundred others. Though deprived now of visible helps and comforters, *nothing can defraud you of the "treasures of memory."* The past can never find a vacant place in your library of thought. No page can be

torn from any of its volumes. All is sacredly stereotyped. In these sunny memories you can bask. Your shadows are in front, and your sun is behind you.

Then, if you rise to the truly elevated view of the Divine dealings, have not your very trials already proved, or will they not in the future prove, as they were designed to be, aids in the prosecution of the journey, gleams of pillar-light in the midnight march, new spiritual forces assisting in the upbuilding of faltering purposes and in the reaching of noble ideals? Naturalists tell us of some migratory birds which, in being carried high by contrary winds, are thus helped onwards in their flight. So, many, buffeted with the adverse storms of trial (what Augustine calls "the severe discipline of the Lord's mercy") have, with weary, drooping wings, been driven to loftier regions and stimulated to loftier purposes. Savonarola avows how, in his case, crushed affection—the dissolved dream of young life—awoke hitherto slumbering aspirations, and raised his whole being to a consecrated mission for God and man.

Happy those whose trials thus serve to bring them near to the ever-living, ever-loving *One*; rousing from the dream of earth, with its often poor cares and debasing secularities, to have their lips attuned to another stanza in the sweet singer of Israel's

canticle :—" In my distress I called upon the Lord, and cried unto my God : He heard my voice out of His temple, and my cry came before Him, even into His ears " (xviii. 6). " They prevented me in the day of my calamity : but the Lord was my stay. He brought me forth also into a large place ; He delivered me, because He delighted in me " (xviii. 18, 19).

> "I see the desolated ground
> With dews of heavenly kindness fed,
> And fruits of joy and love surround
> The heart which Thou hast comforted."

The refrain of David's " Psalm of the Exile " is " *Hope thou in God* " (Psalm xlii. 5). Beautiful, at that crisis-hour of his life, was his calm resignation—the absolute resolving, for good or for evil, his own will into that of a Higher. " If," says he, in words uttered on this same occasion, elsewhere recorded, " I shall find favour in the eyes of the Lord, He will bring me again. . . . Behold, here am I, let Him do to me as seemeth good unto Him " (2 Sam. xv. 25, 26).

Be it yours to aim after a similar spirit of lowly acquiescence, whatever the dealings of God may be. Your duty—your *bliss*—is to ask no questions, or attempt to solve the insoluble, but simply to wait and follow the guiding Pillar in the spirit of an

older patriarch, "faint, yet pursuing" (Judges viii. 4). The time will come when "in God's light you will see light"; when, with eyes opened and mysteries solved in whole or in part, you will own the rectitude of Christ's rebuke of unfaithfulness, "Said I not unto thee, if thou wouldst believe, thou shouldst see the glory of God?"

It is well, too, to note the Divine order generally in these scenes of changeful and chequered life. The sequence is sorrow first, joy afterwards—the bitter first, the sweet afterwards—the cloud first, the bow in it afterwards. Our Marahs and Elims are strangely near and united, just as they were in the successive encampments of Israel in the wilderness. Dr. Bonar, who beautifully notes this in his travels through the "Desert of Sinai," goes on to say: "In token, we broke off a small branch of palm from one of these Elim trees, and laying it on the similar branch we had brought from Marah, we tied them together, to be kept in perpetual memorial, not merely of the scenes, but of the truth which they so vividly teach" (p. 125).

Aged Jacob at first uttered the hasty verdict that for him there was nothing but "the bitter well." But he had a calmer one at last—"his spirit revived." So the day is assuredly coming when rest will follow the toil and stress of battle,

sunshine follow gloom; when bereavement will interpret its often misunderstood mission; when we shall see the present apparently shapeless and incomplete building standing forth in the beautiful proportions of Eternity; our fallen and scattered blossom making way for the immortal fruit; the Pillar of the night projecting on the sands far back to the receding horizon a trail of brightness, a pathway of golden promises now luminously fulfilled; our loved ones, we thought we had lost, waiting for us at the Gate, with the cry and the welcome—"We are all here!" (Acts xvi. 28).

I like the closing words in the following beautiful sentence from one of the great masters of thought and feeling of our age, as he speaks of the remembrance of sorrows here, and the blessed watchers yonder: "Their voices, common enough to other ears, fraught to us with unnumbered memories of life, have become the natural music of earth. . . . To forget, it cannot be. We daily pass through places which are the shrine of a thousand recollections; we are startled by tones which pour on us a flood of conviction; we open a book, and there is the very name; we write a date, and it is an anniversary. . . . That is the most filial hope which, regarding the brotherhood of man as an inference from the paternity of God, *looks to heaven as to another home*" (*Martineau*).

Let these interweaved memories and hopes be summed up in the lines of a living singer :—

"I go to sleep, but sleep itself reveals
The phantoms of a day that long is fled,
And through the land of shadows softly steals
The figured presence of the loved and dead.

* * * *

"Live thou in God, and thy dead past shall be
Alive for ever with eternal day;
And planted on His bosom thou shalt see
The flowers revived that withered on the way."

Sacred Songs.

"OH HOW GREAT IS THY GOODNESS WHICH THOU HAST LAID UP FOR THEM THAT FEAR THEE, WHICH THOU HAST WROUGHT FOR THEM THAT TRUST IN THEE, BEFORE THE SONS OF MEN!"

FIFTH DAY.

SICKNESS SOOTHED.

"The Lord went before them by night in a pillar of fire."

"I said, In the noontide of my days I shall go into the gates of the grave."—Isa. xxxviii. 10 (R. V.).

"The Lord will strengthen him upon the bed of languishing: Thou wilt make all his bed in his sickness."—Psalm xli. 3.

"This sickness is . . . for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified thereby."—John xi. 4.

"O Lord, by these things men live."—Isa. xxxviii. 16.

ONE desert experience to which we may well early advert, an experience to which truly may be given the designation of "Night," is the season of bodily pain and suffering. Is there no flash of the Pillar of Fire, in the shape of consolation and comfort, here?

Let none make light of physical prostration. Only those who have passed through the ordeal can tell of its severity; specially where prostration is combined with acute anguish. Afflictions cannot well be compared. It is wrong and needless to do so. But, while mental agony, the pang of bereavement, as well as other forms of unspoken suffering intenser still, have their terrible environments, the couch of sickness has a gloom all its own. In other phases of trial there are mitigations—lulls in the storm; the sweet influences of nature, the sympathy of friends, and so on. But calm rest is simply impossible when every nerve is racked with torture. Day and night seem to have no room for other than the one monotonous dirge—the passionate questioning—"When shall I rise and

the night be gone?"—"Would God it were evening; would God it were morning!"

"All night I kep my lone and silent vigil,
And looked in vain
For kindly sleep to soothe my restless tossings
And set me free from pain.
I watched until the dawn's first doubtful glimmer
Stole through my curtained room,
And broke with pale grey lights and greyer shadows
Its formless gloom."

Caillard.

And then, say as we may, there is generally deepest *mystery* in these experiences. Bereavement has its appropriate, accepted solaces; the sweet memories of buried love; above all, the thought of the bright Beyond. But these weary vigils of throbbing pain seem to forbid respite. The world's pleasures, lavishly granted to others, seem strangely, I had almost said cruelly, denied and withdrawn. In many cases the poor flickerings of life are all that remain; the long fierce battle is too surely a losing one:—

"And our hearts, though stout and brave,
Still, like muffled drums, are beating
Funeral marches to the grave!"

Yes, to many, bereavement has its higher, loftier solaces: the Bible, with its promises; prayer, with its strengthenings; the House of God, with its teachings. But in the case of the sufferer on his

couch, even Holy Scripture for the time is, in many cases, a sealed book : the gates of prayer are closed ; the footpath to the Mercy-seat is weed-grown. The distant Sabbath bells only convey the remembrance of hallowed associations with "the multitude that kept holiday." There is around nothing but an immensity of darkness! Other broken harps have their surviving strings and lingering chords ; but the sick man gazes only on "the harp on the willows"—life's sweetest music fails to charm, loving looks fail to be recognised, loving words wake up no responsive smile,—the vital springs of being are shattered. In bereavement, God's righteousness is "like the great mountains" : it is patent, visible. But often, in sickness, His judgments are hidden from human view in an unsounded "deep!" What then? After such an indictment as this, does light from the wilderness Column for the first time seem impossible? "Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no Physician there?" Can we only discern the obverse side of the Pillar,—all cloud, no brightness. If we see our Lord, is it only as the disciples saw Him in their midnight sea? Supposing Him to be an avenging angel, a spirit from the deep, "they cried out for fear!" Or, if the peril increases, can we do no more than hold our breath while life is trembling in the balance and the King of terrors passing by?

There *is* balm, not from Gilead and its mountains of myrrh, but from the everlasting hills of heaven. The flaming *Presence* is there ; and "gives light by night to these." Let us seat ourselves under its gleam and gather a few thoughts of comfort.

Tried one, think of all you are now suffering as *needed* discipline,—the strange but sure pledge of a Father's love. These weary days and nights, be assured, are "appointed," to train you for Himself, His work and service now, and for His beatific presence hereafter. Builders at times construct new houses out of ruins. God often does so. From ruined shattered frames He builds up new spiritual dwellings, everlasting habitations. Without that discipline you would miss precious lessons. You would willingly evade these ; but the evasion would involve sensible loss,—a deprivation of moral and spiritual strength. It is no mere hollow sentiment, but a proved experience from the memory of long sickness : "It is good for me that I have been afflicted" (Psalm cxix. 71). "O Lord, by these things men live, and in all these things is the life of my spirit : so wilt Thou recover me, and make me to live" (Isa. xxxviii. 16).

"If any of you have ever stood at the foot of an old beech tree and watched moth or butterfly emerge from the chrysalis, you will have noticed, after the first little opening, with what seemingly

pained struggle the young wings are striving to free themselves. In your pity you take up the chrysalis, and end the struggle by carefully cutting open the useless envelope and freeing the living winged creature. It is said that any such kindness simply means an undeveloped wing-power, by which the butterfly will never be able to soar and enjoy its life. That struggle is the needful condition of full wing-power. Men who cannot struggle can never soar" (*Lovell*). To use a different illustration, no stroke of the chisel in the hand of the Great Artificer is redundant. The soul, like the facets of the diamond, needs the best and sharpest tools to fashion it into a gem for the Redeemer's crown. This is specially true of those to whom the present meditation is addressed. Many an angel of resignation speeds up to heaven from the sick-couch with the message, "*Made perfect through suffering.*"

Remember this, ye who are now undergoing the desert experience, wandering through the wilderness "in a solitary way." There is no place, no occasion (just because of its dreariness and weariness) where God can be more glorified than on a couch of pain, or where more real spiritual strength is imparted. In the words of one of our motto-verses, "The Lord will *strengthen* him upon the bed of languishing: Thou wilt make all his

bed in his sickness" (Psalm xli. 3). To use the familiar earthly phrase, how many in that peculiar school of suffering have "graduated with honours." They came out of "great tribulation." Tribulation (*tribulum*)—the threshing-flail—the grain-sifter, as the root-word imports, winnowing the husk from the seed. And this "tribulation" (taking the Apostle's words in his great chapter) "worketh" (not *im*patience, as we would have expected, but) "*patience*; and patience, experience; and experience, hope." It was the *smitten* rock of the desert that yielded the refreshing waters. Your own feeling, perhaps, may be that with you there can be no such stream; that pent up in that couch of disease and suffering, life is useless,—effort for good is denied. You are like the wounded bird with broken wing struggling in the furrow; envying those around you in their capacity of flight and soaring. Perhaps, though reluctant to own it, you may be among the faithful toilers who have broken down by reason of your very fidelity to duty. The bow was overstrained, and the bowstring has snapped; the harp-chord was overstrained, and the music has ceased. This is the history of many an arrested ministry at home or in the Mission-field. The life of excessive consecration has only paid its martyr penalties. Many a sick-bed sufferer reminds one of the Maréchal Niel rose

that flowers so luxuriantly as often to bloom itself to death. By the very profusion of goodness the root becomes weakened, the overloaded blossom exhausts the mortal energy. But, be still; God has work for you to do, when the wings are clipped and the eye is filmed. If activities are impossible, not so the exercise of the passive virtues.

While you may be bewailing curtailed opportunities and baffled purposes, you can in other ways "glorify Him in the fires." You may see in that shattered body of yours only the house in ruins of which I have spoken, while, in His sight and under His loving discipline, you may in truth be noiselessly rearing an angel-haunted temple. Yours is a shadowed couch; but it is in "the shadow of *His* hand" He hath "hid you." You may be able to say nothing and to do nothing; yet you can remember, in your very helplessness, Milton's noble line :—

"They also serve who only stand and *wait*."

"The Lord is good to them that *wait* for Him." Thus have many stricken souls, by patience and resignation under protracted anguish, been made preachers of righteousness; the chamber of suffering and the bed of languishing made as the House of God and the Gate of heaven! They have been unconsciously singing "Songs without words," and

if called to depart, have left a trail of light behind them. The bereft, who long loved to watch that couch, will recall the "longsuffering with joyfulness" of its occupant.

The following verses are from the "Swan-Song"—written on his death-bed, and found after his departure—of one of the best and best known of our hymn-writers. The place where Dr. Horatius Bonar penned the words gives emphasis to the silent farewell testimony:—

"Long days and nights upon this restless bed
Of daily, nightly, weariness and pain!
Yet Thou art here, my ever-gracious Lord,
Thy well-known voice speaks not to me in vain·
'In Me ye shall have peace!'

"The darkness seemeth long, and even the light
No respite brings with it, no soothing rest
For this worn frame; yet, in the midst of all,
Thy love revives. Father, Thy will is best.
'In Me ye shall have peace!'

"Sleep cometh not, when most I seem to need
Its kindly balm. Oh, Father, be to me
Better than sleep; and let these sleepless hours
Be hours of blessed fellowship with Thee.
'In Me ye shall have peace!'

* * * * * *

"Father, the hour is come; the hour when I
Shall with these fading eyes behold Thy face,
And drink in all the fulness of Thy love.
Till then, oh, speak to me Thy words of grace:—
'In Me ye shall have peace!'"

Above all, look, suffering one, to Him who among His other experiences as the Man of Sorrows knew, as no one else did, the combination of mental and *bodily* anguish. "Himself bare our sicknesses." He, the Great Physician, has, in His Divine-human Person, walked the wards of the Hospital of humanity. If, as we believe, the strongest natures feel deepest—are often most sensitive to pain, surely in a Divine sense was this true of the Ideal Man—the Prince of sufferers —who alone could make the challenge, "Was there ever any sorrow like unto My sorrow?" "Can ye drink of the cup that I drink of, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" "Yet learnt He obedience by the things which He *suffered*." "The Lord," said Savonarola on the morning he was led out to execution, "suffered as much for me." "We cry in our agony, in weakness, failure, perplexity of heart, that there is no hope nor help. No hand seems to direct the storm, no pity listens. "God has forsaken us," we say. Do we say so and not recall the words which fell on that great victory on Calvary—fell from the Conqueror's lips, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" "Blackness of darkness and despair, and feebleness sinking without a stay: these are not failures. In these characters was written first the character of our

deliverance: these are the characters in which it is renewed" (*Hinton*). There is no verse in all the Bible that carries with it a more wondrous message of consolation to the couch of sore suffering than this:—it identifies you with the suffering Christ:—"Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial that is to try you, as though some strange thing had happened to you: but rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when His glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy" (1 Peter iv. 12, 13).

"O trust thyself to Jesus,
When thou art tried with pain,
No power for prayer—the only thought
How to endure the strain.

"Then is the hour for proving
His mighty power in thee;
Then is the time for singing,
'His grace sufficeth me.'"

Come, O sufferer! and like the peasant woman of Galilee touch the hem of His garment. Listen, O sufferer! to the dual chimes floating across the river, under the last gleam of the Wilderness Pillar:—

"NEITHER SHALL THERE BE ANY MORE PAIN."
"THE INHABITANT SHALL NOT SAY, I AM SICK."

SIXTH DAY.

CONSOLATION AND STRENGTH.

"The Lord went before them by night in a pillar of fire."

"I have seen his ways, and will heal him: I will lead him also, and restore comforts unto him and to his mourners."—Isa. lvii. 18.

"Thy shoes shall be iron and brass; and as thy days, so shall thy strength be."—Deut. xxxiii. 25.

BOTH these verses take us to the desert of affliction under the canopy of its starless night.

The first consists, if I may so describe it, of a fourfold flash from the Pillar of Fire in the environing darkness,—a fourfold promise with its graduated scale of consolation. God "sees" us, then He "heals" us, then He "leads" us; then, as the climax, He "comforts" the smitten heart.

It is He alone who does all this. His is the seeing, loving, sympathetic eye; His the healing touch, His the leading, guiding hand, His the restoring solaces. We may recall words of exquisite tenderness—parental love, in another similar voice from the Pillar, recorded in Jeremiah, where the Divine Speaker thus describes His dealings with His people in the wilderness (and they are a true emblem of His dealings with His afflicted Israel still). "In the day that *I took them by the hand* (like a father) to bring them out of the land of Egypt" (Jer. xxxi. 32).

In the other verse—a verse more especially

associated with the mystic column of the Exodus, (it forms one of the farewell utterances of the leader of the chosen race)—there is conveyed a lesson of trust for the future. The "Israel of God," in the most comprehensive sense of the term, are exhorted, resolutely and bravely, to hold on their desert journey, with all its privations,—simoom, hurricane, blinding sand driving in their faces, sharp stones bruising their weary feet. But He who sends their trials gives them pilgrim-garb and pilgrim-sandals specially suited for the roughest, thorniest, most rugged road: "Thy shoes shall be iron and brass." And then, if the future—that unknown, unrevealed future—obtrudes itself with trembling apprehensions, the fear of fearful things, strength is promised equal to the day: "As thy days, so shall thy strength be." The "marching orders" of the past are still addressed to the caravan of mourners in every age. "Speak unto the children of Israel *that they go forward*." There is no time for lingering—bivouacking in these "tents of Kedar." The wilderness way must be trodden. "Not" as an old writer has it, "are they to be carried in litters, but with staff in hand to plod on as best they may." In the very effort of bearing tribulations, facing difficulties, and confronting duty, grace will be given.

It is indeed no small part of trial, especially

after a lacerating bereavement, when the tendrils of the heart are wrenched from creature props, to face the world again; to encounter the old engagements; to toil through the old imperious mechanical drudgeries and grapple with the conventional commonplaces of life. But anything better than becoming a prey to morbid feeling and querulous inaction. There is a Divine panacea in work. I was recently struck with this passage in a Life of the greatest of the many great proconsuls of India, and a Christian besides, on hearing of the saddest of personal sorrows. It reminds us of what Tacitus relates of Agricola. "He wrote a line to his private secretary begging for work, no matter what kind." * In another Biography of the day—these are the words of one as eminent in literature as the other was in statesmanship—"The troubles of business" (sending a message to a friend in deep sorrow) "are God's most bountiful mercies on such occasions. Prayers and business are the only consolations." † Or, as this has been translated into verse, with a wise philosophy, by George Macdonald :—

> "Weep, if thou wilt, but weep not all too long,
> Or weep and work, for work will lead to song."

* Lord Dalhousie's Life.

† Letter from the Right Hon. J. W. Croker.

Elijah was miserable away from former activities, as he sat moping under his desert-juniper, or crouched within the cave of Sinai. "Go, return on thy way to the wilderness," was God's bracing missive and antidote; and his crushed spirit revived. The solitudes of Horeb were left; the moodiness of the lonely life was exorcised in the resumption of the ministries of Jezreel and Carmel.

Mourner, go also thy way under the shelter of the twofold saying—the twofold gleam of the Pillar—God's promised *presence*, and God's promised *strength*. Not aiming at getting the better of your trial—dulling it by some false opiate; but becoming the better *for* it, by grasping anew the pilgrim staff, and with girded loins pursuing your appointed way. Even if the darkness be gradually deepening, the fiery pillar is gradually brightening. It is a question of divine counterpoise and proportion. Strength adequate—more than adequate—for all emergencies.

As you are tempted at times to travel onwards with drooping head and faltering step, let the watchword of the primitive believers in their hours of "suffering affliction" be heard:—*Sursum Corda* ("To heaven with your hearts"). Let your response, like theirs, be—"We have raised them to the Lord!"

"Duty's path may thorny be,
Steep may be her climbing;
But upon her hill-top free,
Sabbath bells are chiming."

Depend upon it the day will come when His gentle, tender dealing will be owned and manifested,—gracious illuminations from the flaming cloud. Standing on the other side of the river, with the wilderness discipline for ever ended, you will then have no memory but this—"Thy right hand hath holden me up, and Thy gentleness (or, as that has been rendered—Thy loving correction) hath made me great" (Psalm xviii. 35).

One thing we must bear in mind. As the Pillar of old was (we may believe) *gradually* lighted, *gradually* revealing its glory at the vanishing of day, so it may be, and doubtless will be, with you. Do not expect a sudden or miraculous illumination. The Great Physician, as in the first of our motto-verses, bids you wait His time, "I will (leaving the period indefinite) heal him, and restore to him comforts." They are only strangely unskilled in trial—the sanctities of bereavement—who would expect and exact the suddenness of an unnatural submission, and harshly forbid the heart its season of sorrow. Nature, in her great yearly parable, teaches the true lesson. The seed of the flower has a slow, long battle with the superincumbent

earth before its petals nestle under the blue sky and are bathed in the sunlight. Often the more beautiful the blossom the greater is the struggle. But the battle is at last won. "The winter is past, the rain is over and gone, the flowers appear on the earth" (Cant. ii. 12). So let us trust God that in *due time*—His own time—strength will be made perfect in weakness. The law in the material and spiritual world is the same, "out of weakness made strong." "For this cause we faint not," is the gradual experience of the weary, burdened pilgrim of sorrow, "for though the outward man perish, the inward man is *renewed day by day*" (2 Cor. iv. 16).

Meanwhile God will take His own way with us, not ours. Sometimes He will say in His succouring love, as He disappoints our fears and more than realises our hopes, "I removed his shoulder from the burden" (Psalm lxxxi. 6). At other times he keeps the burden on: it may even be for a time adds to it, and then He either takes it off, or gives us augmented strength to bear.

Happy those who can tell, as their experience and resolve—

"I come not to avoid my care;
I come not to desert the strife;
I come to seek new strength to bear;
I fly to find new power for life.

"When noontide brings its work to all,
I find my task so hard to be
That I would sink, didst Thou not call,
My strength is perfected in Thee."

Let us only reliantly lean upon Him in the extremity of our weakness; not "discouraged because of the way." He will not reproach us for our feeble pulse-beats, when with plans crossed and purposes thwarted, and deepest clouds lowering, we pass through the Valley of Baca. He will not deal hardly with us if at first it be only with lisping, stammering tongue and bated breath we say, "Thy will be done." Yet, too, observe, His word is conditional on patient continuance in well doing:—"Wait on the Lord, be of good courage, and He shall strengthen thine heart" (Psalm xxvii. 14). Be very sure that He has some great end in this trial. Seek that it may make you holier, humbler, more gentle, more submissive. Let His dealings serve to quicken your footsteps to the true Land of promise, till, the fiery pillar ceasing, the fiery chariot descends to bear you up to reunions that never can be dissolved.

O gracious Healer, Up-binder, Leader, Consoler, come in all the plenitude of Thy pledged love and faithfulness! Enkindle this flaming Column in my present darkness. Put in my hand the staff of unwavering trust. Give me the sandals

specially fitted for the bleeding feet; so that my experience may be that of the mighty host of sufferers who have trodden the same path, "They wandered in the wilderness in a solitary way; they found no city to dwell in. Hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted in them. Then they cried unto the Lord in their trouble, and He delivered them out of their distresses" (Psalm cvii. 4, 5, 6).

If we seek to do our duty in "the daily round, the common task," glorifying God in the season of solemn adversity, He will meet us half-way. "He meeteth him that rejoiceth and worketh righteousness, those that remember Thee in Thy ways" (Isa. lxiv. 5). "*I am the Almighty God*" was the Divine watch-word to the earliest of the Bible's Pilgrim Fathers:—GOD, ALL-SUFFICIENT. We have heard of the Wâdy Mukatteb, in the Arabian Peninsula, with its "written rocks,"—the strange hieroglyphics of later pilgrims in the track of the Israelites. Reader, in closing this meditation, lift your eye to a great monolyth in the wilderness of affliction. Let the gleam of the fiery pillar fall on its letterings. It is an inscription applicable to all varying seasons and phases of trial,—

"AS THY DAYS, SO SHALL THY STRENGTH BE."

SEVENTH DAY.

RESURRECTION AND LIFE.

"The Lord went before them by night in a pillar of fire."

"I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live."—JOHN xi. 25.

"Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light."—2. TIM. i. 10.

DOES the Pillar of Fire throw any gleam of light on the momentous question—a question which has a superlative interest to the mourner—"If a man die shall he live again?"

"If a man die." These first words of assertion are beyond challenge or contingency. "Death hath passed over all men." The desert through which Israel journeyed bore, in miniature, emphatic testimony to the universal doom,—"Whose carcases fell in the wilderness." In their case the legend embraced only forty years, and was limited to a fraction of the world's surface. But the same in its vast sweep includes centuries, eras, millenniums. Like Ezekiel's vision, earth has been transformed into a valley of dry bones; and the same bewildering query of the Prophet has become the problem of ages and generations,—"Son of man, can these bones live?"

Specially is this, as I have just said, an all-urgent question in the season of sorrowful bereavement. It would take away half the heavy burden, it would still and moderate the throbbings of many a broken heart, could belief, amounting to assurance, be felt

that death is not annihilation :—that the familiar phrase of our greatest singer "loved and lost" is, in the latter word of it, untrue ; and in the noblest, grandest sense, that the cherished treasure, for a brief time withdrawn, is a possession still. Few there are who do not know the agony of uncertainty on this subject. I have cited, in a previous page, the acutest trial, though not the most permanent in its effects,—the tenderness—the exquisite tenderness of a mother's sorrow in the loss of a beloved child. Let us for a moment revert to it for present illustration. All the innumerable incidents of a little life of brightness, innocence, and doting affection are recalled :—a flower blighted, not in blossom, but in earliest bud. These tearful plaints will have their response in a thousand experiences,—

"Ah! now the tiny pillow next mine own,
Is never rumpled with a shining head:
My singing birdling from its nest is flown,
The little one I used to kiss—is dead!"

"Shall we never hear his knocking
At the little ivied door?
Will he never run to kiss us
Bounding o'er the oaken floor?

"Has that music gone *for ever*?
Are those tender lispings o'er?
Oh, the terror! Oh, the anguish!
Of that one word—*Evermore*!"

And the dirgeful notes over an infant's grave have only their sad counterparts in the sudden arrest of glowing life in manhood and womanhood; garnered stores perishing in the twinkling of an eye—work and intellect laid low by one sweep of the unsparing scythe. Are these memories only to be tabulated in the corridors of the past:—cherished possessions, fugitive as the withering daisies and forget-me-nots which strew the turf in God's acre?

It is to the grounds and reasons of that "*Evermore*," in its better meaning, we address ourselves in this meditation. We would, in the few words which space will allow, seek to vindicate and justify the two great articles in the creed of Christendom —"I believe in . . . the Resurrection of the body, and the life Everlasting."

We may reverse the order and speak (1) of *the life Everlasting.*

There is, let it be premised in a sentence, an *a priori* yearning after, and belief in, Immortality. Addison's lines may be recalled:—

> "It must be so: Plato, thou reasonest well.
> Else whence this pleasing hope, this fond desire,
> This longing after immortality?
> 'Tis the divinity which stirs within us,
> 'Tis heaven itself which points out an hereafter,
> And intimates Eternity to man."

"Hunger, thirst, and other natural universal desires have not been implanted without a plain intention that they must needs be satisfied. Now there is no more general persuasion, however varied in shape, than that of some after life. There is no appetite to be compared to the desire which is felt for this. Can we suppose that this alone of all the desires of man is implanted in him without any prospect of its fruition? Is this alone a mockery amid the crowd of hopes without which we cannot live? The desire of immortality which man profoundly and unquestionably feels, and which has filled and is filling the hearts of millions—is that to turn out the one delusion—the sole dream of mankind? All things have their fulfilment. Is this, immeasurably the greatest or the most irrepressible and inexhaustible of all—impotent, purposeless, and barren?" *

One startling and perplexing fact, common to the consciousness of Pagan and Christian, is the unequal incidence of pain and suffering in the present economy, and the conviction that there will be equipoise and adjustment in the state beyond the grave. Asaph's Psalm on the prosperity so often enjoyed by the wicked, and the crushing reverses of the righteous, is no mere exceptional

* *Cornhill Magazine*, January 1892.

strain from the lips of a philosophic poet, but the dirgeful musing of humanity. Why this unequal distribution of good and evil?—the golden goblet put so often into the hand of the base and undeserving, while the cup of the innocent is as often brimmed with sorrow. Why Nero in his savagery and lust, clad in imperial purple and palaced in luxury: while the noblest of his subjects are given to the lions or made torch-lights in his gardens?

Why the missionary with his life spent in deeds of noblest sacrifice,—now journeying across burning sands,—now immured in fœtid prisons, now battling with plague and pestilence—ending with early, it may be violent death? Or why the honest and virtuous strugglers among our neglected masses, their only legacy that of "the Bitter Cry": while, contemporaneous and contiguous with these, and such as these, is the pampered, self-indulgent voluptuary, without a thought for others; revelling in plenty, yet living and dying unmourned? Surely the time will come—the place will come—when the anomalies and startling inequalities in the human lot will be rectified—the God of all the earth vindicated from unfairness and injustice! There is a latent certainty in every conscience that defeat and failure cannot be for ever; and that there is a day—an eternity at hand, where

present evil will have its retribution, and present good and goodness its perpetuity of reward.

These and kindred thoughts could be readily expanded. But we prefer to come at once to that other and "more sure word of prophecy,—as unto a light (a Pillar) that shineth in a dark place" (2 Peter i. 19).

What may be called the natural arguments for the immortality of the soul,—feeble intimations and intuitions, demand some more authoritative confirmation. They are at best but

> "An infant crying in the night,
> An infant crying for the light,
> And with no language but a cry."

The world's Redeemer came specially with the longed-for Revelation. The Sun of Righteousness arose with healing in His beams: and the world, long in perplexity about the problem which heaven alone could solve, had the new Gospel-song put into its lips—"The dayspring from on high hath visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace" (Luke i. 78, 79). Let us listen to the Revealer's own words.

In that most precious "Idyll" of the Gospels—the Story of Bethany, there is nothing so precious as His inspiring utterances on this subject. Pris-

matic gleams there shine in and through the "tears of Jesus." Not the two bereft Jewish sisters alone, but His weary, weeping ones in every age He has sung to sleep "as one whom his mother comforteth" with the lullaby—"I am the Resurrection, and the Life: he that believeth on Me" (in the literal of the R.V.), "though he die, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth on Me shall never die."

Take a later utterance from the words of His great Valedictory. "In My Father's house," said He to His about-to-be-orphaned disciples, "there are many mansions. If it were not so, I would have told you." "Were it otherwise" (if we dare to paraphrase the verse) "I would not have mocked your yearnings after a life beyond the grave: I would not have deceived you by fostering hopes that were to know no fruition. You who have followed Me as Incarnate Truth, know I am incapable of deception—fostering delusions. If this world were to be the final portion, I would not have made you pay the penalty of leaving all to follow Me: I would not have beguiled you with myths and fantasies:—"If it were not so, I would have told you." (But) "I go to prepare a place for you: and if I go to prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto Myself, that where I am, there ye may be also" (John xiv. 2, 3).

Once more, read the opening and closing words in the Divine Prayer which follows:—"As Thou hast given Him power over all flesh that He might give *Eternal Life* to as many as Thou hast given Him." "Father, I will that they also whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am; that they may behold My glory" (John xvii. 24). Thus does the Great Shepherd claim as His special prerogative and purchase—to give to His sheep Eternal Life, so that they might never perish: neither any pluck them out of His hand (John x. 28). These earthly words and assurances are further re-echoed by His glorified lips above: as if He would confirm and countersign the teachings in the days of Incarnation,—"To him that overcometh, will I grant to sit with Me on My throne, even as I also overcame and am set down with My Father on His throne" (Rev. iii. 21).

But what, specially to the bereaved, is of gracious moment, is the sister truth—*the Resurrection of the Body*. The Immortality of the soul was not the teaching of Christianity alone. Egyptian, Chaldean, Phœnician, Druid and Parsee, Greek and Roman, Hindoo, Buddhist, and Mahomedan, in their own often false and crude conceptions, have clung to it wholly or partially.*

* The Buddhist indeed goes no further than belief in transmigration, while the Hindoo aspires after absorption

The resurrection of the *body*, however, Zoroaster excepted, is the great revealed dogma Christianity claims as its own.

Let us follow the Pillar through the shades of a Jewish night, and greet the first gleam of morning in the Eastern sky above the Mount of Olives. The weepers and the watchers have come while it was yet dark unto the sepulchre. Behold the rolled-away stone, and listen to the angel-testimony. It was the gladdest "Song in the night" the world had ever heard :—"He is not here, He is risen, as He said. Come, see the place where

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into the Universal Spirit. The Phœnician monuments (writes a recent authority) afford a glimpse of their belief as to a future state ; "a gloomy Hades, whence there was no escape, peopled with ghosts and shadows, weak, and wandering in the darkness ;—such was the Sheol of the Phœnicians." To it the Hebrew Prophet refers when he depicts the arrival of a Tyrian king in Hades:—"Sheol from beneath is moved for thee to meet thee at thy coming: it stirreth up the dead for thee, even all the chief ones of the earth; it hath raised up from their thrones all the kings of the nations. All they shall speak and say unto thee, Art thou also become weak as we? art thou become like unto us?" (Isa. xiv. 9, 10). "Zoroaster," to quote the words of an eminent writer, "taught a future life which was to succeed the present one. . . . On the third night after death, the soul of the dead man approaches the bridge of Chinvat (or assembling). . . . The pure soul passes the bridge, with a company of its fellows, and an escort of the blessed ones into heaven."—*Mr. Gladstone*, *Nineteenth Century*, 1891, p. 674.

the Lord lay!" These tearful women were the honoured bearers of a message to the mourners of all time—"The Lord is risen indeed!" He is "the firstfruits of them that slept"—the first sheaf of a mighty harvest. The immutable pledge and guarantee is given—"Because I live ye shall live also."

Mark the connection between that vacant tomb of Golgotha and "them that are asleep." "For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, *even so*, them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him" (1 Thess. iv. 14). *Easter!*—the day on which Christ rose, carried an infallible assurance to His ransomed Church. Our Christian Sabbath is a doubly sacred commemoration. Let us hail it as such:—the day of Christ's victory over death, yet as a weekly "Saints' day";—the weekly memorial alike of a risen Lord, and of His and our risen dead.

Parent, bereft of the dear one you had surrendered in life's early morning, rejoice as you stand under this bright gleam of the Pillar. Your faith in your risen Lord will help you to self-surrender, and to the accomplishment of what poetry has sung of it,—

> "And the mother gave in tears and pain
> The flowers she most did love:
> She knew she should find them all again,
> In the fields of light above!"

Yes, and other anguished hearts, too, who are not mourning the immature bud, but life in its fulness and completion, the Easter bells have rung for you, also, reviving chimes. Come to that "sepulchre in the Garden." Lo! the sepulchre seems gone, and the garden alone remains, filled with flowers emblematic of immortality.

"Oh! weep not, though the beautiful decay:
Thy heart must have its autumn—its pale skies,
Leading, mayhap, to winter's cold dismay.
Yet, doubt not! Beauty doth not pass away;
His form departs not, though his body dies;
Secure beneath the earth the snowdrop lies,
Waiting the spring's young resurrection day."

"*Within and Without.*"

"The inmost longing," says Dr. Macmillan, "of every human heart is not for an unknown and untried human happiness, but for a restoration, beautified and unalloyed, of what has already been. We do not care for substitutes for what we have lost. What we want is a resurrection of our dead loves, our past joys. . . . We shall not be human existences here and spiritual existences there, but human existences in both worlds. We shall be ourselves for evermore."

"Fields of the past, to thee shall be no more
The burial ground of friendships once in bloom,
But seed-plots of a harvest on before,
And prophecies of life, with larger room
For things that are behind.

"Live thou in God, and thy dead past shall be
Alive for ever with eternal day;
And planted on His bosom thou shalt see
The flowers revived that withered on the way
Amid the things behind."

Rev. Dr. Matheson.

A Risen Lord has solved the enigma of pre-Christian times,—the anxious quest that trembled with uncertainty on the lips of the holy and good—"Shall the dust praise Thee; shall it declare Thy truth?" "HE hath *abolished death, and brought life and incorruption to light*" (R.V.). The glad sound breaks the muffled stillness of the death-chamber—"Thy dead shall live. . . . Awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust" (Isa. xxvi. 19). More than one has noted a sarcophagus in that shrine of Christian shrines – the Duomo of Venice. We may accept the words of a brilliant writer and teacher as a parable of our present theme. "The tomb fashioned like a couch where a Doge lies with placid face; while the sunlight from the window strikes in upon him as he sleeps, and angels draw his curtains, as ready to wake him from his long repose." Perhaps more beautiful, and more to the point still (well described in an interesting volume by Mr. Carrick, B.D.), is the custom observed in all the Oriental churches on Easter Eve. A crowded congregation have gathered in the cathedral. Pensive twilight has merged into dark-

ness—a darkness that may be felt. Throughout the throng is a hush of impressive silence, or a silence only broken by the lugubrious wail of the "*tenebræ*." Suddenly, as the great bell outside strikes the morning hour, the Bishop celebrant proclaims, with uplifted hands, "The Lord is risen!" The announcement is accompanied with the lighting of candles from the holy fire which had been left glimmering on the altar. In an instant the darkness is dispelled. The voices of the choir mingle with the sweet chimes of tower or belfry, responded to by the worshippers: "Alleluia! The Lord is risen!" Many a broken heart in that multitude, with the thought of their beloved departed, doubtless mingle a special note in the thanksgiving:—

"BLESSED BE THE GOD AND FATHER OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, WHO ACCORDING TO HIS ABUNDANT MERCY HATH BEGOTTEN US AGAIN UNTO A LIVELY HOPE BY THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST FROM THE DEAD."

EIGHTH DAY.

FUTURE RECOGNITION.

"The Lord went before them by night in a pillar of fire."

"And so shall we ever be with the Lord." – 1 THESS. iv. 17.

"And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof."—REV. xxi. 23.

I PROCEED in this meditation to a great theme of comfort which follows in natural sequence our last :—one of the inquiries most sacredly uppermost in the night of bereavement.

When the farewell to earth is bidden, and the last flickering spark of life expires, what as to meeting once more? What as to the restoration and recognition of our beloved dead in heaven?

Light there assuredly is : not amounting, perhaps, to the indubitable revelation and certainty of a doctrine. Wise reasons, doubtless there are, for assigning to the theme a subordinate, I might rather call it inferential place in Holy Writ. But enough is vouchsafed, alike by deduction and statement, to warrant strong presumption, if we may not use the more pronounced word, of assured confidence.

The gleam of our desert Column may, in the first instance, fall on some Bible attestations. They are, doubtless, familiar to all who have pondered the subject. I may simply gather them together, without attempting either novelty or expansion.

Let God Himself speak: and let the Divine Father's words be interpreted by the Incarnate Son.

The Jehovah of Israel revealed Himself to Moses in the burning bush as "the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob" (Exod. iii. 15). He refers to these patriarchs not as those whose being terminated with their decease; but as distinct existing personalities: while Christ's comment on the declaration, in answer to the sophistry of His Sadducean questioners, is this—"For God is not the God of the *dead*, but of the *living*." These founders of the race survived too, not in the sense of being merged indistinguishably in the multitudinous spirit-world, but bearing their old names, retaining their old identity. When they died,—or, using the Scripture expression, "gave up the ghost," it is again and again repeated that they were "gathered to their fathers." No mere departure of the soul to some friendless, inhospitable shore, where human ties and associations are unknown—where no earthly voices are heard to give welcome when the storms of life are passed and the haven is reached. Abraham, in the literal sense of the words, could not be so "gathered." The graves of his kindred were not in Canaan, but in distant Mesopotamia. The sacred historian records that his honoured dust was laid, and to this day it rests, in the sepulchre at Hebron—"in

the field of Ephron the Hittite." The same formula is used regarding both Moses and Aaron. Their bodies, we know well, were deposited in no paternal or ancestral vault, but in the solitudes of Mount Nebo and Mount Hor. We may not, indeed, feel warranted in claiming for an ambiguous phrase more than a surmise. But it is surely suggestive at least of a different, a nobler, and more enduring "gathering" than that of "dust to dust, ashes to ashes, earth to earth." May it not rather lead us to refer to the reunion of saintly patriarchal pilgrims "beyond the flood,"—that the Father of the faithful, when he surrendered the breath of life, went to join the well-known company who had already emigrated to a better Land of Promise,—the Abels and Noahs and Enochs of an earlier era? We love to think of this reassembling of kindred spirits in the city which hath foundations, to which Abraham by faith had long "looked"—a regathering in the true Fatherland. Thus these great ones of the olden time, in going to colonise the Canaan above, would have the covenant promise in its highest and sublimest sense fulfilled in the bliss of intercommunion. "I shall go to *him*," was the sob and solace of David's broken heart in the very moment when he gave vent to the corresponding thought of anguish—"He shall not return to me." That blighted flower would not

only re-bloom in the garden of immortality, but he would *see* it, *recognise* it, *love* it, as his own. His comforting soliloquy is not, 'I shall go to heaven, where I know the spirit of my child somewhere is, though all trace of the dear earthly face and form be denied;' but 'I shall go to *him*: and the thought will prove more to me than the dearest, most cherished jewel in my crown. I shall go to *him*, where the silver cord of parental love shall no more be loosed, nor the golden bowl broken.'

These side lights of the Pillar have their confirmation in the New Testament. Surely in that revelation which we have on the Mount of Transfiguration, the enigmatical words just spoken of are corroborated in the vision of the excellent glory. Two of the most conspicuous fathers of the race were there summoned from "The Great Beyond":—Heavenly visitants with no angel-forms:—no delegates from the Church triumphant who in their translation from earth had lost, in a purely spirit-world, all trace of mortal resemblance. They were "Moses and Elijah";—the one the representative of the risen *dead*. The other of the translated *living*. They are known to Christ—known to one another, known to the disciples, known to the latter as distinctly and clearly as their own Master was:—"Let us make three taber-

nacles—one for Thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias." When they disappeared in the darkness and silence, they resumed, doubtless, their place and names amid the Church glorified.

Nor can we forget, that, though veiled under the drapery of parable, our Lord Himself represents the angels as carrying Lazarus to the bosom of Abraham, and the rich man as addressing him, though "far off," by *name*,—"Father Abraham." Moreover, the identical Lazarus who lay stricken and neglected at his gate, is further spoken of as carrying on a *conversation*,—not between two invisible spirits, but between two recognised personalities.

We cannot overlook our Blessed Lord's own words. He seems to put the seal of confirmation on this regathering, when heaven is delineated as a family feast, and the guests as "sitting down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the Kingdom of their Father."

We note a still further gleam from the same Pillar-cloud in the graveyard of Bethany. Martha's weeping was hushed, and her heart comforted with the words—words spoken through the tears of the Great Consoler—"Thy *brother*" (not Lazarus) —but "thy *Brother* shall rise again." An assurance not for the bystanders only, but for the mourners of all time.

As with the utterances of the Saviour, so also with those of His chief Apostle. In that most consoling of messages to some bereft Thessalonian families, St. Paul speaks in similar reassuring terms regarding "them which are asleep"—that their returning Lord at His advent "will bring them with Him" (1 Thess. iv. 14). Here surely, again, is there a reference not to an aggregate, indistinguishable mass, but to units, to individuals. What words—what language could possibly be more significant—"They too which are alive and remain shall be caught up *together* WITH THEM in the clouds" (v. 17). He ends the passage with the same elevating consolation, which we have selected as the first of our motto-verses. Who can doubt it was the restoration of hallowed earthly bonds that bulked largely in his view, and formed the chief consolatory thoughts to these broken hearts; a beautiful element in the rapture of the saints? "And so shall *We*"—We—the members of families who have lived, and loved, and prayed, and rejoiced together,—We, regathered in *bundles* by the Angel-reapers—"WE shall ever be with the Lord" (v. 17).

"What is my joy and hope and crown of rejoicing?" exclaims the same ardent Apostle—in an apostrophe of blissful anticipation—"Are not *ye*," is the reply, "in the presence of the Lord Jesus?"

Ye, whom I have known: to whom I now indite this letter; Ye for whom I have "travailed in birth till Christ be formed in you." In his elevating chapter of Corinthians, so solemnly associated by us with the funeral crowd and the grave, he assuredly leads us to infer the same comfort from the analogy of nature. Every seed has its own body. From that which bloomed and faded and apparently died—upsprings, in the cereal or floral resurrection—the exact replica and reproduction of its former self. The grains of corn taken from the granary are transformed into a golden harvest by a law of heredity "after its kind." The tiny and often unsightly seeds of the garden fulfil, in shape and colour and fragrance, the prognostications of the planter. "Whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap." "*So also is the resurrection of the dead.*"

And though we have spoken only of St. Paul, we may surely make a similar deduction from the sayings of others of the inspired penmen. To take one of many passages from the writings of the beloved Apostle:—his glorious vision of the white-robed and palm-bearing multitude. In the opening question of one of the Elders—"What are these arrayed in white robes, and whence came they?"—we see no indiscriminate throng. The veil seems again lifted to disclose individual members of the

ransomed family, each with a human history, varied records of the great tribulation out of which they came; groups—"family groups"—may we not call them, of the glorified, whom the Lamb "leads" from pasture to pasture, and from fountain to fountain. Their very tears seem distinctive, as the Divine Hand wipes away every lingering trace of sorrow (Rev. vii. 13-17).

Leaving these, and other Scripture testimonies, there is, above all, the inner testimony—the corroborative verdict of the smitten human heart. We cannot believe that our relatives and friends are allowed to pass into a land where former human relationships are terminated and obliterated. "That our love for our departed ones continues at all, is in itself both an augury and a promise. If its purpose ended here, it would fall from us when they die, as a withered branch from a living tree" (*Fellowship*). Can we subscribe to a cold philosophy of life and death like this, that would permit fellow-pilgrims knit together below in golden links—going hand in hand up to the very gates of glory—then and there to be severed, exchanging only mournful mutual farewells? Worshippers in the house of God on earth, are its quickening and hallowed fellowships to be denied them in heaven? No! Heaven is the ideal HOME: and, if so, the element of love cannot be wanting in its many

mansions. Our deepest and most sacred feelings and instincts recoil from oblivion tenets. The doctrine of the Communion of Saints, enshrined specially in the creed of the Church militant, must have its counterpart, or rather its perfected realisation, in the Church triumphant. The love of husband, wife, parent, child, brother, sister—the purest, most hallowed, most divine experiences of earth, are not to be annihilated in the hour of dissolution, blotted out from the joys of the glorified. Our heart's deepest yearnings say No! "Many waters"—even the waters of Jordan cannot quench love. It is a poor, selfish, inadequate theology which speaks of these earthly affections as superseded above by something higher and better: that God's love will supplant all subordinate affinities: that the tiny human satellites will be lost and extinguished in the glory of the great central Sun. Why not combine the two? St. John in another of his sublime visions—one of our motto-verses—seems to do so. He assigns, not to rival but to co-ordinate forces their due proportions. He puts the Divine affection first and highest. If you will, the earthly will be but as a taper glimmering in the sunlight. Be it so. Moreover, even as tapers—subsidiary sources of joy and bliss, they may not be required. What says he? "The city had *no need* of the sun, neither of the moon, to

shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof." There may be, there shall be "no *need* of them,"—no need with the superlative glory. But they are there, notwithstanding. Earthly sun, moon, star, satellite, are still to shine as lights in the celestial firmament. God is verily to be "all in all." But to me it lends a greater—a pre-eminent glory to a future world, to see earthly love even in the presence of the heavenly, undimmed and undarkened; yea, rather having a purer, diviner effluence under uncreated rays. After the Pillar of Fire had led the Israelites to Jordan, the land of Promise was parcelled out, we know, to tribes and families. Will it not be so in the true Canaan? The God of all the families of the earth, will be the God of all the families of heaven. As individuals, will they not gather at "The Marriage Supper of the Lamb"? As individuals, will not the words of the Great King be fulfilled—"I shall drink no more of this fruit of the vine, till I drink it new with YOU in My Father's Kingdom"? Yes, the thoughts of eternal fellowship with Christ, and reunion with the glorified and risen dead, are the two—the binary stars in our present dark sky. The love of a loving Lord is helped by creature love. What God hath joined together let not man take asunder. The same thought is thus far better

and more beautifully expressed by an eminent Prelate—"When we thus associate the two together, the earthly love becomes the trellis up which the heavenly creeps; the two are blended, and the amaranthine clusters close the heavenly framework" (*Wilberforce*).

Dry your tears, mourning children of God! That look in the hour of departure—photographed for ever on your heart of hearts—was not the last. When you uttered the words of the old Roman Christian, "*Vale, dulcissimæ*," you did so with a happy reservation. It was the farewell of earth alone. You shall meet again. The earthly light of the wilderness Pillar will not be removed. Heaven is Fatherland and Motherland, Brotherland and Sisterland. Though its superlative glory will be this—"They shall see *His* face, and *His* name shall be in their foreheads," yet other faces and names will not be expunged from the calendars of eternity. There will be the cadence of familiar tones and chimes in the tide of song which rolls on for ever.

"Though down the long, dim avenues of the past
Their swift feet fled,
In His eternity the rooms are vast.
There wait they to be ours at last;
They are not dead.

"And nothing in them dies that was alive;
All that endears
And sanctifies the human must survive.
Of God they are, and in His smile they thrive
Through deathless years.

"I love to trace that legend on their tomb,
The '*Emigravit*' of a saintly shrine.
True they are gone:—but gone to colonise
'The better country,' and our coming wait.
Their presence haunts us in the home they left.
They pledged reunion with their parting breath."

Think of them even now:—sainted love bending from above—the great cloud of witnesses looking down on the struggling athletes—the toiling pilgrims beneath—and cheering them with the thought of a meeting which is to know no parting, a blessed rendezvous of *kindred*-ties that are to know no dissolution.

"So let the eyes that fail on earth,
On Thy eternal hills look forth;
And in thy beckoning angels know
The dear ones we have loved below."

Whittier.

As one after another of the chartered heirs of heaven enter on their inheritance, the old greeting of earth will be set to the music of the skies—"This my Parent, my Brother, my Son, was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found." We shall recount together, in that land of tearless eyes and

undimmed suns and unblighted memories, the story of Redeeming love—the new song will be sung by the same voices that were attuned to our own with it here :—

"God does not send us strange flowers every year.
When the spring winds blow o'er the pleasant places,
The same dear things lift up the same fair faces—
The Violet is here.

"It all comes back—the odour, grace, and hue,
Each sweet relation of its life repeated.
No blank is left, no looking for is cheated;
It is the same we knew.

"So, after the death-winter it must be,
God will not put strange signs in heavenly places:
The old love shall look out from the old faces—
Violet! I shall have *thee*."

"Yes, the hour, the hour is hasting,
Spirit *shall* with spirit blend;
Fast mortality is wasting,
Then the secret all shall end!

"Let our thoughts hold sweet communion,
Let us breathe the mutual prayer,
Till, in heaven's eternal union,
Oh, my friend! to meet thee there."*

* I have only just read the calm, unimpassioned words of the great Prelate who, in two brief months, had been bereft of his five children. It is the first entry in his diary after the unparalleled trial. "When last I wrote, I had six daughters on earth: now I have one—an infant. . . . I thank Thee for the bright hopes of a happy reunion, when we shall meet to part no more." (*Life*, vol. i., p. 190.)

Go then on, under the gleam of this glorious anticipation, that the sacred intimacies here, will be renewed and perpetuated in glory.

The old magnet-power of human love potent as ever,—a continuity of the earthly bonds :—though its battles be over, comrades still in the great army, recounting victories achieved together. Endure, meanwhile, as best you may, the present aching void, the vacant niche, the strange silence, the blank of separation. Journey on with this gladdening light of the desert Pillar—

"Till God's love set you at their side again."

"WHEREFORE COMFORT ONE ANOTHER WITH THESE WORDS."

NINTH DAY

MYSTERIOUS DEALINGS.

"The Lord went before them by night in a pillar of fire."

"What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter."—JOHN xiii. 7.

NOT "now." The Pillar may as yet be unlighted; no stars may as yet be in the sky. The one thought and experience may be—"this great and terrible wilderness." "Where is now my God?"

Alas! it is easy with the lip to speak of the duty of lying dumb under the rod—the nobleness of submission. This exhortation, glibly spoken, comes too often from those who have never themselves entered the inner depths of trial; who, however kindly meant, venture to address the smitten heart with conventional phrases of solace. They, unwittingly but unskilfully, probe the wound; in ignorance of how their words of intended condolence only lacerate. Resignation, aided with the soothing influences of time, *does* generally, and in due course, manifest itself. In the deepest night-watches of sorrow, the lullabies, not of man but of God, come in to soothe to rest, and to still the surges of the soul.

The assurance which heads our meditation, varying in its phraseology, is often that which

Christ employs. On the present occasion, when His own disciples, all unconscious of their impending bereavement and orphanhood, were at His side,—when He Himself was on the borderland of superhuman suffering,—too truly the Pillar without the gracious radiance,—when in His hour of gloom and desertion He uttered the "climax cry,"—His balm-word is, 'Do not make rash assertions; do not form hasty conclusions; do not misinterpret mysterious dealings, looking more at the clouds in the horizon, than at the golden waves rippling at your feet. The Pillar now, and in moments of impending terror, may be but a darksome column to you; dark as it was to the Egyptians of old. You look in vain for illumination, guidance, comfort. But leave your "hereafter"; leave alike the dreary present and the desolate future with *Me*. I would deepen the lesson in this the hour when I Myself most need it—"Hold thee still, and know that I am God."'

Objects and processes in outer nature and common life may aid illustration.

Go visit in thought one of the luxuriant valleys of the Holy Land, with which He who spake our motto-verse was so familiar in His daily journeyings. Amid the abundant vegetation, there is one tree peculiar to the country, alike in Judæa, Samaria, and Galilee—the mulberry or sycamore-fig, whose

cluster-fruit, much resembling the fig in appearance, is brought to perfection in high summer. But how is this ripening obtained? The process is strange, abnormal. To all appearance it involves the mutilation both of branch and fruit. I shall leave one to describe who is familiar beyond most with the flora of the Holy Land, as well as the happiest of spiritual interpreters. "In order to produce fruit, the part of the tree where it buds requires to have a cut or wound made in it; for, unless this is done, the tree will be barren. From the wound or opening made in this way, a bud springs up which grows and forms the fruit. Then, further, when the fruit is about to be ripe, it requires to be punctured with a sharp instrument in order to make it eatable. . . . The sycamore tree originates in a wound and is ripened by a wound."

Take a kindred illustration familiar alike at home and in Palestine. Watch the pruning of these vines. Most of us may have seen the process. What an apparently merciless spoliation! These graceful offshoots running along the trellis—these exquisite leaves of tender green—the beauty alike of the terraced hills of Syria and of the home conservatory—a delight and refreshment in form and colour—the last thing the uninitiated would dream of sacrificing, now strew the ground or the cold flagstones at your feet. "To what purpose is

this waste?" The purpose to the ordinary inexperienced eye, undiscernible, as in the case of the sycamore, has in due season its revealing. The mellowed purple autumn clusters will vindicate the needs-be and wisdom of the seemingly ruthless use of the pruning-knife. The lopping of what is redundant, is in order to give fresh strength to the branches: to allow the vital sap and vital forces to permeate the leaders, swell the fruit, and ensure glory and abundance to the fruitage.

Watch that block of Carrara marble! It has looked from its heights since the birth of Time over the blue waters, or been gazed down upon by galaxies of stars in the depths of an Italian night-sky.

Why disturb this sleep of ages? Why subject this fragment of a noble cliff to the tool of workmen, defrauding earth and heaven of the grandest of monoliths: wrenching it from its "throne of rocks" to lie prone, scarred, discrowned, amid dust and *débris*? Follow it to the sculptor's studio There is a slumbering angel in that insensate mass. The chisel of Michael Angelo or Canova transmutes the outcast thing into all but breathing life, and transmits a legacy of power and beauty to generations unborn.

Watch, yet again, behind the tapestries in the hall of the Gobelins! Note the blurred colours

and tangled web in their bewildering confusion. To the unexpert eye all is disharmony and ugliness. Pass from the row of cunning workers to the other side of the framework, and see the picture in process of manufacture. It is a piece of finished loveliness—every tint and colour blended in perfection—a triumph of textile art.

God is that Fig-pruner, Vinedresser, Sculptor, Artist. He works unseen. His ways are past finding out. Present dealings ofttimes appear crude, harsh, unkind. That loving heart pulseless : that kindling eye of genius closed : that tender frame, shattered with the scar-marks of suffering : that home, so long resonant with joy and song, silent and voiceless.

Wait the disclosures of Eternity. Then shall we see what we were unconscious of at the time, that all was needed. That vine and sycamore have not been pruned in vain ; the marble has not been wrenched from its rock-socket and chiselled in vain ; the "pleasant pictures" have not been wrought in the web of life in vain. Doubts and questionings and impeachments will be at an end then : "In that day, ye shall ask Me nothing" (John xvi. 23). A friend of Principal Shairp tells, that, on the morning he died, looking out with his old love of nature on a Highland loch, he said, "It is very misty now, but it will soon be perfectly

clear." Yes, there will be no trace or memory in the halls and walls of heaven of broken thread and inharmonious pattern. The completed tapestry will then at least, when the Divine shuttle has done its work, be seen to glow with perfect and perpetual beauty in the Palace of the King.

Meanwhile listen to the following words of some gifted minstrels. They seem to form an appropriate triplet of Hope and Trust for all downcast Pilgrims :—

"I hear it singing, singing sweetly,
Softly in an undertone,
Singing as if God had taught it,
'It is better further on!'

"Night and day it sings the sonnet;
Sings it while I sit alone;
Sings it so my heart will hear it,
'It is better further on!'

"Sits upon the grave and sings it;
Sings it when the heart would groan;
Sings it when the shadows darken,
'It is better further on!"

"Further on! but how much further,
Count the milestones one by one?
No—no counting, only trusting—
'It is better further on!'"

In different imagery, here is the panacea of the greatest of our living poets, as thus he describes

the Personation of the same heavenly Faith and Trust :—

"She reels not in the storm of warring words;
She sees the best that glimmers through the worst:
She feels the sun is hid but for a night;
She spies the summer through the winter bud;
She tastes the fruit before the blossom falls;
She hears the lark within the songless egg;
She finds the fountain where they wailed 'Mirage!'"

While a still later singer adds his sweet tribute, —as if the desert and the night Pillar were in view,—with the great *Light* of glory terminating all :—

"Not yet thou knowest how I bid
Each passing hour entwine
Its grief or joy, its hope or fear,
In one great love-design:
Nor how I lead thee through the night
By many a various way,
Still upward to unclouded Light
And onward to the Day!"

"WHY ART THOU CAST DOWN, O MY SOUL? AND WHY ART THOU DISQUIETED WITHIN ME? HOPE THOU IN GOD: FOR I SHALL YET PRAISE HIM WHO IS THE HEALTH OF MY COUNTENANCE."

TENTH DAY

PRECIOUS DEATH.

"The Lord went before them by night in a pillar of fire."

"Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints."—PSALM cxvi. 15.

ANOTHER gleam of the desert Pillar in the closing night of all. Despite of prevailing unbelief and rebellion, the verse may doubtless have served as an epitaph for the graves of not a few of the Israelites in the course of their long travel from Egypt to Canaan; but specially appropriate surely would its inscription be on the heights of Mount Nebo.

Never was "life" more "precious"; never death apparently more baffling; never loss more irreparable. The great commander—the great hero of that vast host, to be summoned away ere his work was completed! His eye was yet undimmed—his natural force unabated. His was manhood in its highest consecration—manhood on which God had set His royal mark. It was in a critical season, too, in the Exodus march, when sagacity and forethought—all the astutest qualities of leadership were needed. Ten thousand others might well be spared. But it was the indispensable *one*, with his serene wisdom and inspiring presence, "the viceroy of God," to whom the summons was addressed—"Get thee up and die!" (Deut xxxii.

49). The call was meekly responded to. All alone he ascended to his sepulchre, all alone he departed. If that departure took place at night, he had better than symbol of fiery pillar—(the funeral taper of the desert). The Jehovah of the radiant column was Himself close by. For not by kinsman, or helmed warrior, or stoled priest,—not by man nor by angel were his obsequies performed. The legend on his grave is the strangest, grandest in Scripture. It tells that the most honoured of all the burial rites of earth were his. "*God buried him.*"

"Nobly thy course is run;
Splendour is round it;
Bravely thy fight is won,
Victory crowned it.
In the high warfare
Of heaven grown hoary,
Thou'rt gone like the summer's sun,
Shrouded in glory!"

We can imagine next day, as the sun rose on the mourning camp, how the tribes or the best among them, as they realised their blank, would, with bated breath, give expression to their emotion by antedating, in spirit at least, the words of the Psalmist: "*Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints!*"

Reader, though in circumstances more personal and domestic, you may at this moment be absorbed

in grief over the enigma and mystery—the havoc and defiances of death. The desire of your eyes and the delight of your heart may have been taken from you. You may be, indeed you are, unable yet to grasp hold of the words at the head of this meditation or get beyond the natural expression of the broken heart,—"Precious is the *Life*!" You are standing by a sepulchre of buried hopes. The hush of oblivion—a silence that almost may be felt is around you. It was but yesterday existence was a "valley of vision" opening everywhere glades and vistas. Now it is a yawning chasm spanned with a "Bridge of Sighs," from the farther side of which seems to come the dirgeful, piteous accents—"They which would pass from hence to you cannot!" All that seems left now are inanimate portraits looking down from the walls. You have memories—doleful souvenirs and associations—no more; the flower planted in the garden; the love-birds with drooping wings in the untended cage; the hushed notes of favourite music; the unshared walk by stream or meadow; it may even be the deserted plaything or unused toy. The charm has retired from these life-pictures. The once long, prophetic dream has vanished like summer lightning. You had fondly hoped to keep your loved ones at your side,—to claim their ministries of affection in times of sickness,

perplexity, trouble,—saying, in the great Master's words, "Tarry ye here and watch with me!" What havoc a few brief months have wrought! Your castles of golden sand! One wave, or it may be wave upon wave, of calamity has come, and swept them away. Whether it be beautiful natures, or strong natures;—the one like the graceful birch and its tresses, the other like the ancestral oak "moored in the rifted rock." At morning they were bathed in sunlight or fanned by gentle zephyrs; but the unforeseen storm has been let loose, and the things of "beauty and strength" lie prone on the ground. As you sit under your "Oak of Weeping," casting its shadows on the grave of the loving and beloved, these lines of an unknown mourner may express simply and pathetically your experience:—

"What did the old year bring?
Six feet of sod in the acre of God
Where the robins sweetly sing.

"What did the old year bring?
A silent hearth and a saddened earth,
With the loss of everything."

Or words of pathetic tenderness and truth, better known:—

"Break, break, break,
At the foot of thy crags, O sea!
But the tender grace of a day that is dead
Shall never come back to me!"

Nay, say not "Never." That sick-bed, that grave, has a better beyond. In the midst of your tears, listen to the words of this old minstrel of Zion. Let them steal into the hushed chamber like a serenade of angels:—"*Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints!*" Death with its densest darkness to sight and sense (a pillar of *cloud* indeed), is, in the words of the poet, "stricken through, with rays from the inner glory"; the hopes full of immortality. As the Pillar that was all gloom and mystery to the Egyptians was all light to Israel, so is the gate of death when seen from within the heavenly portals. An iron gate on this side; on that, "every several gate was one of pearl" (Rev. xxi. 21).

"Ye grope, tear blinded, in a darksome place,
And touch but tombs. Look up, these tears will run
Soon in long rivers down the lifted face,
And leave the vision clear for stars and sun."

Let not the depressing "nether voice and vision" recall to you only the shrine once so sacred, now a heap of dust mouldering to decay. Death is not annihilation. It is the blossom dropping, that the immortal fruit may ripen. The bud forming—waiting to burst forth into verdure next spring—is the cause of the old leaf falling off. It is truly to make way for a better, a more blessed Easter, in which decay is unknown. George Herbert's

thought of the passing from this world to glory, as "going from one room to another," is a feeble exponent of the reality. I like Mason's definition better, "Death is the funeral of all our evils, and the resurrection of all our joys." It is a step in the infinite progression of the soul. It is the encasing sheath taken from the chrysalis to let the incarcerated spirit free. It is God's own summons—"Come up higher." The casket may perish, —the jewel is indestructible. Jesus Himself encountered death; He entered the dark valley and its darkest experiences with a hymn of triumph: "Now is the Son of man glorified, and God is glorified in Him!" (John xiii. 31). In a lowlier sense, your dear departing ones, falling or fallen asleep, can echo these words of their dying, ever-living Lord.

The last saying of a well-known Christian senator—venerable in years as mature in faith—may be recalled: "You are leaving," said his friend, "the land of the living." "Say not so," was his reply; "I am leaving the land of the dying, and going to the land of the living."

"Farewell, farewell, my beloved!
We must say farewell again,
And I know that thy heart is breaking
With a great and speechless pain.
Yet things are clear to the dying,
Which the living cannot see,

And God, in His infinite mercy,
Hath comfort for thee and me.
Soon we shall think on the parting,
And the sorrow it gave, no more;
Yet we could not have known such gladness
Unless we had wept before."

Caillard.

Ponder, too, the beautiful clause in our motto-verse—"Precious *in the sight of the Lord.*" Natural—only too natural—is the clinging of the bereft heart rather to the preciousness of the *life.* It is different with the great Life-giver. He sees His work done,—the mission of existence completed. Life is but a loan from Him. At His good pleasure He revokes the grant and resumes His own. As a father rejoices to welcome back again his son from the distant colony after years of absence; —as the shepherd of the parable rejoices with the angels of heaven over the "lost and found"; so, in the sight of the great Lord of all, precious is *death*: because it takes the pilgrim to his heavenly Hospice, the child to his heavenly Home. As with Moses, GOD "buries" your loved ones: yes, and "*His* own beloved ones," that He may leave all that can *die* in the earthly valley, and take all that *lives* for ever to Himself in the eternal Canaan. Whether it be from the heights of Pisgah, 4000 years ago, or from the grassy turf and "mouldering heap" of the quiet British church-

yard of to-day, there comes the chime—the blessed requiem: "The beloved of the Lord shall dwell in safety by Him" (Deut. xxxiii. 12).

Yet another thought, suggested casually in an interesting volume describing simple Christian peasantry under the sunny skies of Northern Italy, with a faith different from ours, but with hearts the same. At times, with them, as with us, loved ones are taken, the knowledge of whose preciousness is confined to the home circle. They die otherwise unknown. While outwardly more distinguished lives and deaths are unfolded in volumes to the world, their deeds, their gracious characters, loving words and loving ways are left unchronicled. But, unrecognised by man, they are not forgotten in heaven. There are recording angels in default of human pens. The writer tells the beautiful myth (a poetical way of stating a reality), "They have a story in the Veneto, that the angels come down into the *Campo Santo* at night with their golden censers, and burn incense at the grave of those saints *whom nobody knows*." * "Precious"—whether in peasant garb, or in silent chamber, or in priestly raiment, or in royal robe—"in the sight of the Lord" and of His angel-watchers, "is the death of His saints." "*The Lord knoweth them that are His.*"

* *Christ's Folk in the Apennine.*

"Oh, 'tis a placid rest,
Who shall deplore it?
Trance of the pure and blest,
Angels watch o'er it!
Sleep of their mortal night,
Sorrow can't break it;
Heaven's own morning light
Alone shall wake it."

Bereaved mourner! let these gleams of the Pillar irradiate your present desert darkness. Perhaps He who has taken your dear one from the loves and affections of earth, wishes the more, and the better, to raise your love to Himself. He points you to your withered and blighted flower, and tests you with the challenge—"Lovest thou *ME more* than these?" Seek, as one of the results of your trial, to make Him increasingly the focus of your being—the Centre in the circumference of your present sorrow. Earthly "presences" are gone. But thus would the unchanging God speak from the cloudy pillar by day and the fiery pillar by night—"My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest." He would take you now, as Christ did His disciples, from the Valley of trial up to the Mount to get these glimpses and pledges of reunion,—assurances that when those, like Moses and Elias on the heights of Hermon, have departed, you are left with Better than the best of earthly friends: "They saw no man save *Jesus only*!"

If blighted memories of the years that are fled be beyond recall, look forward with confidence to everlasting fellowship in a deathless heaven: they and you with Christ, and Christ and you with them. Resume the midnight march saying, "Let Thy loving Spirit lead me forth to the land of righteousness" (Psalm cxliii. 10).

Happy those, who, with love thus revived, and faith strengthened, and resolves quickened, and ties with the glorified renewed, can prolong the verses already quoted—

"What will the *new* year bring?
No more to roam from the heavenly home,
Where the joy-bells ever ring.

"What will the new year bring?
A year nearer rest with Him I love best,
In the presence of our King."

"I WAIT FOR THE LORD, MY SOUL DOTH WAIT, AND IN HIS WORD DO I HOPE."

ELEVENTH DAY.

SUBMISSION.

"The Lord went before them by night in a pillar of fire."

"Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in Thy sight."—MATT. xi. 26.

"Father, if Thou be willing, remove this cup from Me: nevertheless not My will, but Thine, be done."—LUKE xxii. 42.

"SUBMISSION to the Divine will is the softest pillow on which to recline."

Words easily spoken, but often hard to be realised and understood. Submission comes; but it is not unfrequently, as with Jacob at Peniel, whose experience has been more than once referred to; a battle has to be fought all the long night through, and only terminated with the morning light. One affliction is sore enough. One bereavement is sufficient to dim a lifetime. The lines may well describe the memory of *one* loved object taken—

"It filled the room, and it filled my life,
With a glory of source unseen;
It made me calm in the midst of strife,
And in winter my heart was green.
And the birds of promise sang on the tree
When the storm was breaking on land and sea."

But it is often affliction on affliction, "wave upon wave," one blow after another in quick succession, till, in the touching words of the old ditty—

"The leaves o' the forest are a' wede away."

In long bygone years, I have known families, two

especially, thus visited, subjected to "sorrow upon sorrow," whose language might well be that of the same patriarch:—"Joseph is not, and Simeon is not, and ye will take Benjamin away" (Gen. xlii 36). Not a few are there all the world over, who, with more than one blighted memory, can thus tell their heart and life loneliness, "Call me not Naomi, call me Marah, for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me" (Ruth i. 20).

"I knock and cry, Undone! Undone!
Is there no help, no comfort—none?
No gleaning in the wide wheat plains,
Where others drive their loaded wains?

"Oh, eyes that for my children's sake
Have poured forth tears like summer rain!
Oh, breaking heart that will not break,
Yet never can be whole again!"

Many of my readers may be familiar, others not, with the modern dramas of Ibsen. Despite of crudeness, gloom, pessimism, which have subjected them not undeservedly to cynical sneer and stricture, they are undeniably "forces" in modern literature, and will survive assailants. In perhaps the ablest of them the Norse tragedist depicts, with touching pathos, a father, bereft of wife and child (*his all*), straining his eyes—if we may use the figure of this book—for the Pillar. In the opening scene, "with a mighty sob, and hands clasped

above his head, he throws himself in his distraction prone on the steps, and the cry of anguish rings out on the dank, chill air—"*Jesus! Jesus! give me light!*"

By-and-by, his chief comforter, or rather comforters, gone, and miserably inadequate all other earthly ones, he wails the dirge—

> "'Tis terrible to stand alone,
> Where'er I look to gaze on death.
> For bread my hot soul hungereth,
> And each man reacheth me a stone."

Then, at a still further stage, words—the refrain—only too familiar, must have been echoing in his ears—

> "Plundered—plundered—all is plundered,
> The last tie to earth is sundered!"

The dramatist has represented his hero in the pursuit of a noble *ideal*, that of absolute self-surrender to God—submission without reserve: "*God all in all.*" I need not pause to note that, in the case of this fictitious character, there was subsequent though heroic failure in the struggle—the one blemish, as has well been pointed out, in an otherwise true creation of genius.* Enough to say, that the tragedy, even as it stands, has its solemn lesson to us all: the possibility of other, it may be many

* See *Westminster Review*, April 1891.

trials, beyond the one whose shadow may be brooding over us now,—"deep calling unto deep." This in order to moderate grief and nurture resignation. There is a common phrase—"Things might have been, things may yet be worse." The thought should repress the reflection, which we are all, when staggering under a terrible blow, apt to make, "No trial was ever equal to mine!" God has promised, and God will give, endurance in the hard battle,—the battle through tears and blood. He will second and quicken the resolve for perfect undeviating surrender of our own wills to His, enabling us to breathe, with a new emphasis, the familiar lines—

> "Renew my will from day to day,
> Blend it with Thine, and take away
> All that now makes it hard to say
> Thy will be done."

Above all, in the midst of the darkness we shall look, with yearning solicitude, for the gleaming column, and cry out, in this Poet's invocation —"Jesus, Jesus, give me light!" knowing the truth, not of man's word, but that of our Divine Guide and Leader—"He gave light by night to these!"

Sorrowing one, and in this meditation I address those who have undergone or are undergoing, not an ordinary but "a great fight of afflictions," whose

pathetic avowal is "I am so troubled that I cannot speak" (Psalm lxxvii. 4),—you are now casting your eye along the vistas, the receding corridors of the past. You see taper after taper of earthly light extinguished. It seems as if you listened to a series of doleful echoes in these halls of grief and of death! Strive—it may be at times an almost hopeless effort—by that submission which Christ taught us all when He accepted the cup, to bring your antagonistic wills into harmony with His, and for His sake "to glorify God in your day of visitation." He never denies to the trusting soul "The Angel of Patience," so beautifully sung of by the Minstrel of the far West—

> "To weary hearts, to mourning homes,
> God's meekest Angel gently comes;
> No power has he to banish pain,
> Or give us back our lost again;
> And yet in love most tender, dear,
> Our Heavenly Father sends him here."

"If thou intendest," says Luther, "to vanquish but cannot overcome, then know that there is a secret and loving physical herb to serve thee, named *Patientia*." Blessed is he or she—heroes and heroines of God—who, in the midst of baffling providences, and the crossing and severing of yearning affection, have obtained the moral victory; able to sing the night-song under the gleam of the

Pillar—"*Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in Thy sight!*"

Undoubtedly one of the severest appointments and tests of trial, is the protracted burden you may be called on to bear; the baffled prayers; the delay in a gracious answer; the apparently needless strain on faith, the feature that was so well known to HIM who made the piteous appeal, "Why art Thou so far from helping Me, and from the words of My roaring? O, My God! I cry unto Thee in the daytime, but Thou hearest not, and in the night season, and am not silent" (Psalm xxii. 1, 2). Our Father has some wise reason for all He does. We may feel assured the prolongation as well as the intensity of the trial is ordered by Him who acts, not arbitrarily, but who "considers the soul in adversity." One of our best living teachers in the school of affliction says: "Sorrow is prolonged for the same reason as it was sent. It is of little use to send it for a little while. In the majority of cases time is an element in its working its right effect upon us. If the weight is lifted, the elastic substance beneath springs up again. As soon as the wind passes over the cornfield the bowing ears raise themselves . . . Just because swiftly passing disasters have little permanent effect in moulding our wills, it is a blessing and not an evil to have some

standing fact in our lives which will make a continual demand upon us for continually repeated acts of bowing ourselves beneath His sweet, though it may seem severe, will." Maclaren's (*Unchanging Christ*, pp. 284, 285.)

> "We take with solemn thankfulness
> Our burden up, nor ask for less;
> And count it joy that even we
> May suffer, serve, or wait for Thee,
> Whose will be done."

Sorrows—protracted sorrows—thus often quicken in the suffering disciple the resolve of a suffering Master—"Lo, I come, to do Thy will, O God!" Yes, my brother or sister, seek *patiently* to endure this furnace seven times heated, that so you may emerge from the purifying fires of God, a vessel fit for the Master's use. Try not to misinterpret Him, or to harbour reclaiming thoughts: not too curiously prying into the why and the wherefore of His dealings, but submitting with unmurmuring lips to the training of the Great Master. "Yet learnt He obedience by the things which He suffered" (Heb. v. 8). St. Paul, the first moment he felt the conquering power of redeeming love and rose a soldier of the Cross, had this given him as his commission,—"I will show him how great things" (not he shall do, or speak) but "he must *suffer*" (Acts ix. 16). Nobly did he obey and

follow the leading. In his future life he sought to carry out the spirit which inspired the Laureate's battle-song—

> "Ours not to make reply,
> Ours not to reason why,
> Ours but to do and die."

It is a beautiful saying of Christ by the lips of the greatest of His prophets, "I was not rebellious" (Isa. l. 5). Shall we not much more "be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live"? (Heb. xii. 9). As you look wistfully for the Pillar-cloud in your desert darkness, calling out—*Jesus! Jesus! give me light!*"—may your experience, even though "after many days hence," be the testimony of an old Israelite; adding, it may be, the sacrifice of thanksgiving for mercies mingled in the trial. The verse has been thus rendered:—

"GOD IS THE LORD, WHO HATH KINDLED FOR US THE FLAME. BIND THE SACRIFICE WITH CORDS, EVEN UNTO THE HORNS OF THE ALTAR."

TWELFTH DAY.

FULL SALVATION.

"The Lord went before them by night in a pillar of fire."

"This Man receiveth sinners."—LUKE xv. 2.

"I am the Light of the world: he that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life."—JOHN viii. 12.

THESE pages would be incomplete indeed, were there no reference to the darkest experience by far in the pilgrim journey—that of *sin.* No sooner did the Great Dreamer in his Allegory lay him down to sleep, than the heavy burden unfolded itself in vision, dominating all other thoughts and filling the foreground of his picture.

All the more is such reference needed, because a season and experience of sore outward trial often deepens the consciousness of wrongdoing. It is when the Angel of affliction comes down and troubles the water, that the mud and slime, otherwise undisturbed, come to the surface and reveal pollution. It is a gloom this, more terrible than bereavement. Other trials have their varied and varying shadows, but the acutest agony is that of a soul that seems to itself to have made forfeiture of its better being,—"Without God and without hope." I do not now speak of the general doctrine, common to the creeds, of "human depravity." That is not to be gainsaid. There is,

indeed, a deep abiding sense in all of spiritual alienation. But what now claims to be considered are overt acts of transgression which in the case of many have left deep gashes in life's retrospect—deepest in the case of professing believers, who, "once enlightened," "tasted the heavenly gift and the powers of a world to come," have been betrayed into presumptuous sin: stars, which, despite of perturbations, had for long duly kept their orbits, bathed in pure light, but who have now broken loose from the divine sphere, wandering in the blackness of darkness. From tremulous lips the wail is heard, "Mine iniquities have separated between me and my God: He has hid His face from me, so that he will not hear." What need of specifying; whether it be concealment of truth or breaches of honour; departures from rectitude or purity; the almost intolerable thought of "sacrilege" in the defilement of that which is the recognised "Temple of the Holy Ghost"; the shame of dishonouring Christ by hypocritical profession and falsity of life. The heavens above seem palled in blackness, the knell of despair is rung. The lips give conscious vent to the bitter cry, as the heart sighs in vain for days, the memory of which is all that remains—

> "Oh, to go back across the years long vanish'd,
> To have the words unsaid, the deeds undone,

The errors cancelled, the deep shadows banished,
In the glad sense of a new world begun:
To be a little child whose page of story
Is yet undimm'd, unblotted by a stain,
And in the sunrise of primeval glory
To know that life has had its start again!"

But, alas! the fresh start seems to be forfeited; the page is blotted; the sunrise is dimmed; the shadows seem brooding over an irrevocable past. "Sighs and tears and lamentations," to use the words of another, "are the echoes of unutterable sorrow made articulate . . . broken hearts and mental and spiritual agony are among its daily, hourly results" (Illingworth). King David's experience—the great warning beacon of Old Testament story—is ever familiar. None knew better than he the misery of wrongdoing, the heart in its agony, and sin in its baseness; the loss of self-respect, the shipwreck of faith and of a good conscience. Like him, not a few with whom, in the course of long years, we have now and then come in contact in "the hottest rage of the battle," are constrained to pour forth in the ear of the All-seeing, All-searching, what they may have succeeded in screening from the eye and ken of man, "Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Thy sight, that Thou mightest be justified when Thou speakest, and be clear when Thou judgest." I purposely state the case in its deepest,

darkest colours,—sins against light and love and duty and privilege; the skeleton in the closet that dare not be divulged, kept under lock and key, and yet that refuses to be charmed into oblivion; the stains on the hands depicted by our great dramatist that cannot be washed out, and which cleave to the soul with damning reality.

Is there no gleam of light in the Pillar of God for such? Or does the hopeless dirge alone wake the echoes of the wilderness—"the soul that sinneth it shall die"? Is the bridge, like that of the old Roman warrior, cut down behind, barring return: a fixed gulf, so that "they which would pass from hence to you cannot"?

There is one thing, let it be premised, that is righteously impossible. God, by a wise, immutable law, has so connected sin with suffering, and memory with transgression, that in one very real way the sense of this broken union with Him cannot, at all events in this world, be undone. There is a perpetuity in moral actions. There is no cancelling of that principle of equity, "Whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap." There is no oblivion-power to grant escape from the inexorable declaration, "Every man shall bear his own burden." "What I have written, I have written." In the case of the great delinquent just spoken of, who penned the fifty-first Psalm, the past could

not be obliterated by repentance, however genuine and sincere. It is, indeed, the true wail of a penitent, but yet it is the dirge of a broken heart, a heart which, even with the bliss of assured forgiveness, carried its pang to a dying day. "My transgression," "My transgressions"—continued, like a cancer, gnawing the vitals of conscience. The gleam of the Pillar-cloud was never again so luminous as it had been in the brightness of his early days, when he sang his Shepherd-Psalm and felt the peace of the green pastures and the still waters. And so, every soul that has defiantly sinned must be content to bear the dishonourable scar, and say piteously to the last, "My sin is ever before me!"

But further than this we cannot go. If God, as set forth in prophecy and psalm and gospel, be anything, He is THE FORGIVER OF SIN. His name and memorial is "Thou wert a God that forgavest them" (Psalm xcix. 8). "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself; but in Me is thy help" (Hosea xiii. 9). "I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins: return unto Me; for I have redeemed thee" (Isa. xliv. 22). Even crimson and scarlet sins fail to exclude. I can read the words gleaming in the thick darkness, "I will be merciful to your unrighteousness, your sins and your iniquities will I remember no more."

And how is this? The Israelites in that Sinai desert had one pilgrim memory, perhaps more vivid than any other, which explained all. In the night of the Exodus, the blood of the Paschal Lamb was sprinkled on the lintels and door-posts of every Hebrew dwelling; and when all other homes of Egypt were smitten by death, the destroying Angel, as he saw the covenant-token—the "passover" to God's righteous wrath—passed the others unscathed. It was a glorious miracle and parable and type in one. "The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin." That initiatory rite of the wilderness carries with it the voice of God to this hour—"*When I see the blood I will pass over you*" (Exod. xii. 13). "Even when we were dead in sins" (DEAD—no qualification or exception surely here) "hath quickened us together with Christ." Borrowing from another desert memory, our true Aaron "stood between the living and the dead, and the plague was stayed." It is easy for cynics to interpose with a sneer, and cavil at the inequitableness of such declarations. 'Is it not,' is their covert taunt, 'giving encouragement to sin in its worst phases? If there be such comfortable terms of condonement at last for an immoral life, why not plunge into maddest excesses, run riot in evil-doing, if a Saviour be provided to remit all debts, cancel all claims, and throw wide to its

utmost capacity a door of mercy?' It is the old carping insinuation, "Shall we continue in sin when grace so abounds?"

Be it so; sin, let us only say, has bitter enough deterrents and retribution, notwithstanding this free, gracious exercise of sovereign grace and mercy. But despite of innuendo and impeachment, we can only take God at His word, and accept with reverence and gratitude His own assurance of gospel forgiveness: forgiveness written on the Cross of Christ for all ages, for all climes, for all natures and all nations. We can only delight in thinking that to many a heart full of foreboding and "battered with the shocks of doom," the words have come like a plank to the castaway, "Wherefore He is able also to save *to the uttermost!*' The music of Christ's own *Eirenicon* has lost none of its pathos,—a gospel enshrined in a gospel,—"God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John iii. 16). God be thanked that we have not to cut out of our Bibles the fifteenth chapter of St. Luke's Gospel!

Yes, and this is best of all; that music *has* been heard; the gospel message has been tasted and tested. The lost sheep *has* been brought home, the lost son *has* been found. He who met Saul

on the way, has met many others like him who have listened, and trembled, and believed, and rejoiced. Dying lips have told the same story—"The chief of sinners; but I obtained mercy!" The cry of the lonely wanderer in the Church's prophetic song has been re-echoed by thousands,—"I have found Him whom my soul loveth" (Solomon's Song, iii. 4).

Oh, mourning one—mourning above and beyond all others, because it is trial without solace; the night without the pillar; the cloud without the bow,—walking in darkness and can see no light:—with no further parley, close with the Divine overtures of pardon. If you *have* been—if you *are*, now "fighting against God," at once capitulate. Take up that apparently strangest of pleas of the man who had foully stained his crown and put a crash of discord into the music of his holy songs, "Pardon mine iniquity, *for it is* GREAT!" (Psalm xxv. 11). Make trial of the assurance, "I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely: for Mine anger is turned away from him" (Hosea xiv. 4). "Seventy times seven" is Christ's measure of forgiveness for injuries. Will He make His own principle less in dealing with a fallen brother or a prodigal child? Will, in this respect, the servant be *beneath* his Lord? And though among your other misgivings may be the consciousness

of moral inability—the tyranny of habit—a blunted conscience, a degraded will, a ruined, perverted nature, that seems incapable of assimilating with what is pure and lovely and of good report:—there is provision made here also "for them that are truly penitent." If you desire to do your Lord's will, there will be an unseen Presence, as with the old wrestler at Jabbok, to help you in your night of struggle. You will slowly but gradually emerge from the mists and fogs of the valley to breathe a bracing atmosphere, and even rise to heights of character and conduct you cannot now believe. It is strange, but true, that men are often most thoroughly purified in the crucible of their own sins. I am bold to say the collapse you mourn may make the rebound all the greater and more enduring, just as David's very transgression led him to cleave to God with greater tenacity of purpose; or as Peter's bold denials, selfish cowardice, and base ingratitude, coupled with the memory of the Divine forgiveness, went far to make him the hero he became, and transformed the pusillanimous craven into the man of action. Out of weakness he was made strong; able, after he was "converted" (turned from his own sin), to "strengthen his brethren." It is Olshausen's remark on this Apostle's penitence, "Only let the heart at bottom be sincere and true to God, and the soul may soon

rise again from a very deep fall." "In our low degradation," says an able analyst of the human heart, "there remains something sacred, undefiled, the pledge and gift of our better nature; a germ of indestructible life, like the grains of wheat among the cerements of a mummy, surviving through 3000 years, which *may* be planted and live and grow again." (Fred. W. Robertson's Sermons, Second Series, p. 96.)

Rise to the dignity of your "better being." Relinquish the ignis-fatuus gleams of earth; turn from the bale-fires of sin, and pitch your tent without delay under the flame of the Pillar-cloud.

> "Something ere the end,
> Some work of noble note may yet be done,
> 'Tis not too late to seek a newer world."

Leave, at once, the harbour with its treacherous reefs; and with canvas fresh-stretched, bear out to the freedom and safety of God's great "Pacific." You may have, and will have, your hours and moments of fearfulness and depression, aye of failure. "But He fainteth not, neither is weary." Unlike the fitfulness of your frames and feelings, the tide of His love ripples on for ever. Turn the poet's words, derived from one of Nature's best parables, into a prayer:—

> "The vales shall laugh in flowers, the woods
> Grow misty green with leafing buds,

And violets and wind-flowers sway
Against the throbbing heart of May.

"As Thou hast made Thy world without,
Make fair again my world within;
Shine through its lingering clouds of doubt,
Rebuke its haunting shapes of sin."

Whittier.

As David gathered material for his Temple from the spoil of the Philistines, so may you upbuild a new spiritual Temple over the conquest of your sins. You can, from a dead past, from hostile forces that were long against you, uprear a divine, spiritual sanctuary. Let the first of our motto-verses, specially, call you above all to Him, who with His own blood hath purchased this forgiveness for you. He, as the Image of the Invisible God, was the Revealer, not of the might and power and awfulness of Jehovah, but of His love, goodness, sympathy, compassion. The mighty heart-throb of the Brother on the Throne is still the same,—"*This Man receiveth sinners.*" The most battered flower may lift its head to the great Sun of Righteousness. The leper can still feel and own the marvel of His healing touch. The outcast, frowned on by a Pharisaic world with its conventional severities, may, in a figurative sense, creep as of old to kiss His feet and bathe them with tears. He was and is—it is His favourite name and prerogative—*the Saviour of the lost.*

And if there be the aggravation in the sin you mourn, that it is the transgression, not of the unbeliever in the wilds of wickedness, but of the professing child of God,—the sin of one who formerly knew the joys of salvation, but who has forfeited them,—whose soul was once a consecrated shrine, but has *Ichabod* now inscribed above its portico; mournful (in one sense, indelible) as are the memories of your fall, take comfort, in the midst of remorse and sorrow, that it is not a lapse (it cannot be) which entails irreparable ruin. No, as an old writer says, "it is the fall of a child within the house," or, as the same idea is better still expressed by a great teacher of the age, "Thank God, it is a fall on deck, not overboard!" Christ, whether to the penitent transgressor or the penitent backslider, is the same receiver of sinners in His glorification as in His incarnation. He did not drop the robe at His ascension as Elijah did at his.

> "This spotless robe the *same* appears,
> When ruined nature sinks in years;
> No spot can change its glorious hue,
> The robe of Christ is *ever* new."

As God is even now, in the gleam of the wilderness symbol, saying, "Seek ye My face," let lip and heart respond, "Thy face, Lord, will I seek!" He will answer from heaven by *fire* (1 Chron. xxi.

26). This is the beacon-light He kindles for His pilgrims; this the song He puts in their lips:—"God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." An author, familiar with the classic Tweed of Scotland, and the noble ruins on its "silvery stream," tells (*Burning Bush*, p. 36), that on one of the transept walls of the famous Abbey of Melrose, there are words still legibly engraven by some pious devotee of a long by-past age. They seem appropriate in closing this meditation:—"WHEN JESUS COMES, THE SHADOW GOES." In the saying of "that same Jesus" quoted in our preface, in connection with the gigantic Temple-lamp kindled at the Feast of Tabernacles, He hushes the unrest of despair by the Revelation of HIMSELF—the true Pillar of Fire in the pitchy gloom of the soul's deepest night:—

"I AM THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD: HE THAT FOLLOWETH ME SHALL NOT WALK IN DARKNESS, BUT SHALL HAVE THE LIGHT OF LIFE."

THIRTEENTH DAY.

VALLEY OF ACHOR.

"The Lord went before them by night in a pillar of fire."

"Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her. And I will give her her vineyards from thence, and the Valley of Achor for a door of hope: and she shall sing there, as in the days of her youth, and as in the day when she came up out of the land of Egpyt."—HOSEA ii. 14, 15.

WORDS, surely, to be read under the gleam of the Pillar. The whole symbolism in the verses speaks of the Exodus and the desert wanderings. These completed, the Valley of Achor opened its gates of hope to the pilgrim host.

It is the God of the afflicted, the God of the mourner who here utters and unfolds His own mysterious dealings.

Perhaps what first strikes one in hearing or reading the passage is, how vividly the Divine Speaker brings Himself into the foreground in addressing the children of sorrow. He leads His spiritual Israel out to a wilderness of varied disciplinary experience. But He has no wish to conceal His hand. The judgments as well as the mercies are His own. All commentators have noted how with emphatic reiteration occurs this personal assurance, "*I* will allure," "*I* will bring," "*I* will speak comfortably," "*I* will give vineyards," "*I* will open a door of hope."

There is nothing—no, nothing—in the hour of trial so infinitely comforting and sustaining as the

thought dwelt upon more fully in a preceding meditation, that what we speak of as the contingencies of life, be they joyful or sorrowful, prosperous or adverse, are divinely appointed. Looked at by themselves they are often utterly perplexing. Yes, if we allow for a moment the suspicion of chance, or fate—the bewildering and depressing element of "second causes"—to enter into them; if we refuse to recognise the guiding Pillar throughout, then terribly is the torture of affliction aggravated and intensified.

But "the Lord reigneth." "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away." I will go through the wilderness, I will confront its dreariness and weariness, its suffering and privation, conscious that the God of the Pillar-cloud goes before me. Other gospel comforts, greater far, are ours. But let the simple foundation-truth of solace be clung to with an ever-deepening trust:—"Who knoweth not in all these things that *the hand of the Lord* hath wrought this?"

Another gleam of the column—another gracious assurance in the verses is, that He who unfolds Himself here, as the bringer into the wilderness, reveals in its midst wondrous consolations. "Vineyards" and their vines, belong, as is well known, to fruitful valleys and sunny slopes, sharing these with the fig, pomegranate, and olive. Their

"habitat" is associated with such names and such fertile places as Sibnah and Sorek, Engedi and Shechem, Hebron and Eshcol ("the valley of the cluster"). An abnormal growth is here promised in the sandy, waterless desert, where root and fruit would seem alike impossible. What does this singular figure mean, but that God, in the season and solitudes of trial, provides spiritual helps otherwise unknown, unrecognised, unlooked for? There are kindred passages of Isaiah where similar imagery is employed, "In the wilderness shall waters break forth, and streams in the desert. And the parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water." "Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir tree, and instead of the briar shall come up the myrtle tree" (Isa. xxxv. 6, 7; lv. 13). God, if we only trust Him, will transfigure our sorrows, bringing good out of evil, light out of darkness, order out of confusion,—giving "beauty for ashes." When the Israelites approached their journey's end, there were hymns of thanksgiving raised, similar to those that had reverberated, at their outset, on the Red Sea shores. So, says our verses, will the faithful Jehovah put into lips, now tremulous with emotion, similar minstrel-songs. "She shall sing in the days of her youth, and as in the day when she came up out of the land of Egypt."

This indeed cannot be believed or credited at the moment of trial. "No chastisement for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous." Yet "nevertheless, afterward, it yieldeth the peaceable fruits of righteousness."

Affliction is God's supreme vicegerent in the spiritual world. He sees it needful at times, as it is expressed in the immediately preceding context, "to destroy our vines and fig trees" (Hosea ii. 12), that, bared of earthly attractions and allurements, we may be the readier to listen to His "summons to the wilderness" and reap a heavenly vintage of His better providing—the "new wine of the Kingdom."

Adversity nurtures the Christian graces as nothing else can, rekindling smouldering fires, rousing dormant energies. "Suffer and be strong" is the pilgrim watchword. "Strength in weakness" is a true paradox. To quote the words of an able interpreter of nature, "Our ideal is rest and ease, Christ's ideal is service and suffering. The Alpine Soldanella, on a sunny pasture, among the bleating of sheep and a host of gay flowers, grows into a luxurious wealth of leaf and blossom, and looks a bloated, pampered lordling. Five thousand feet higher, midst ice and snow, biting glacier winds, moraine and grey shale, it is a hardy, bright blossomer, where no other plant could live, cover-

ing lonely spots with life and beauty in its humility and faithfulness, a bright witness to the Creator's presence and care. Which, think you, is the plant's ideal life?"

Let us yet further learn from our theme, that the best fruit of affliction is the more vivid and glorious unfolding of God Himself. He allures into the wilderness—away from other rival and competing fascinations, that the weaned soul, out of these solitudes of trial,—chastened, subdued, humbled,—apart from the gleam and glitter of earthly things, may have its affections centred on Himself alone. He removes from other claimants, that the glory of the Fiery Pillar may stand alone in its undivided radiance. The name of our volume reminds one of the Order of the Star of India. That insignia was created immediately after the dark and gloomy time of the East Indian mutiny. It consists of a double star of rays of gold and diamonds, inscribed with the appropriate motto, "Heaven's light our guide." The Jehovah of the Night Column is alike that Light and that Guide; and as He takes His Israel into the depths of the desert, He says, "I will go with them; I will give the promise of new and gracious revelations of My own presence and love in the hour of trial." He is alike "Morning and Evening Star" in the desert of sorrow. How many can testify "Thou hast been a strength to the poor,

a strength to the needy in his distress, a refuge from the storm, a shadow from the heat." "As the shadow of a great rock in a weary land" (Isa. xxv. 4; xxxii. 2). Perhaps, we may add, more tender unfoldings are given of the exalted sympathy of Him who was "made perfect through suffering." He who is the true Vine most vividly manifests Himself when the branches are lopped, bleeding with the pruning knife or crushed in the wine press. It is the happy illustration of a writer,—a remembrance common to all who have visited the Convent of San Marco in Florence, how Fra Angelico's pictures of Christ meet one in every niche and corner and hall of the tortuous building. So it is when traversing the corridors of affliction that we have the most frequent and most gladdening glimpses of the Man of Sorrows. Pictures of Jesus in His Divine Person, His own life and character; pictures of Bethany and Capernaum, of Nain and Olivet and Gethsemane, confront at every turn of the sacred story and calm us with strange soothing power. We can say, in the words of the Apostle most congenial in spirit with the gentle Florentine just spoken of, "We beheld His glory, the glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth" (John i. 14). It is Christ who mainly inspires the desert song of Hosea. The anthem, common to the whole Church of the ransomed, comes with special

pathos and power addressed by the children to the Head of suffering humanity, "Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood."

"O Jesus," says Thomas à Kempis, in his *Imitation*, "Brightness of the Eternal glory, Comfort of the pilgrim soul, with Thee are my lips without a voice, and my very silence speaks to Thee; come to me, Thy poor servant, and make me glad."

Reader, has the Divine Chastener, by reason of these wilderness dealings, put this new song into your lips? The nightingale, as the name implies, is a song-bird of night; its melodies are loudest, sweetest, in twilight and darkness. Seek to honour God in your night-season by such tributes to His wisdom and faithfulness. Confident of the combined love and rectitude of His ways, let your sufferings and sorrows be sanctified and consecrated by submission to His will. Let your trials sob themselves away like the retiring thunder, disclosing, when the storm-cloud has passed, rifts of blue in the sky. Turn your Valleys of Achor, whatever they may be, into doors of hope. Silence even death-knells with the chime, "In the world to come, life everlasting!"

And if we can further prolong, it is only to recur to our opening lesson, but now with special reference to the closing hour of all. Death—our own

death and the deaths of those we love—is the appointment of God. If He shows His guiding hand and sovereignty in all the varied events, the gleams and glooms of life, so, be assured, He decrees the time, the circumstances of the terminating journey; when Jordan shall be reached; when the mission of the Fiery Pillar shall be ended; when its light shall be reflected for the last time in the dark waters, and Achor's rocky gates be unbarred! Oh, as not the hours of existence, so not the hour of death is left an "open question," haphazard, indetermined. It was He who gave the final summons to Israel's leader. It was He who selected the rocky cleft in Mount Nebo for His place of sepulture, and, under the desert's starry sky, composed His servant's limbs for their final rest. "David, by the will" (or, as that means, by the *appointment*) "of God, fell asleep and was laid to his fathers." We may appropriately remember the Prophet Elijah, as he took his last journey by the same Jordan which Israel crossed; the horses in the chariot of fire were prepared by Him whom he loved to call "the Living Jehovah." "Tarry here, I pray thee, for THE LORD hath sent me to Jordan" (2 Kings ii. 6). Like an earlier patriarch "he was not, for God took him" (Gen. v. 24). By every death-bed, and by every grave, the words of assured comfort may be uttered, "HE turneth man to

destruction, and saith, Return, ye children of men!" "The Valley of Achor," the literal valley, as those who have seen it can testify (Wâdy Kelt), is itself a gloomy gorge, hemmed in by the most frowning rocks of Southern Palestine. But it is the entrance, the portal, from the Jordan Valley leading up to Jerusalem.

Death is that Achor. Gloomy in itself, rayless and sunless. But it is the way to the New Jerusalem, the true "City of the Great King." Each ransomed Israelite, emerging from the flood, conscious of an unseen but felt PRESENCE, may pass up through it with the song of hope and triumph—"O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?" There is a beautiful myth in the martyrology of the first ages, that a young Roman heroine of the faith, with patrician blood in her veins (St. Christine), on being thrown by her persecutors into the Tiber, refused to sink in the turgid stream, and had her whole countenance haloed with light. "The Pillar of Fire," under whose gleam and glory she had lived, was true to the last. So will it be with the redeemed, "the suffering people of God," "whom He hath redeemed from the hand of the enemy." To re-quote a favourite text, "When thou passest throught he waters" (the swellings of Jordan) "I will be with thee!" The humblest of His Israel will then be strengthened

to sing the song of faith, as the Pillar is about to have its radiance merged in floods of heavenly light. "Surely when the great waters overflow they shall not reach unto him. Thou art my hiding place; Thou wilt preserve me from trouble; Thou wilt compass me about with songs of deliverance" (Psalm xxxii. 6, 7, R.V.).

"YEA, THOUGH I WALK THROUGH THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW OF DEATH, I WILL FEAR NO EVIL: FOR THOU ART WITH ME; THY ROD AND THY STAFF THEY COMFORT ME."

FOURTEENTH DAY.

PARENTAL TENDERNESS.

"The Lord went before them by night in a pillar of fire."

"I will be a Father unto you."—2 Cor. vi. 18.

"As one whom his mother comforteth."—Isa. lxvi. 13.

"As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings: so the Lord alone did lead him."—Deut. xxxii. 11, 12.

THREE gleams from the Pillar of Fire.

A triple emblem and relationship of earth is taken to set forth the paternal love and tenderness of God:—dealing as a Father; comforting as a Mother; and then is added a figure very subordinate in itself, but still beautiful and touching—a figure surely appropriate here as associated with the "Wilderness of the Wandering" and the bird of its rocky heights.

The latter words, indeed, form a part of the great Leader's own retrospect of the Divine dealing. Jehovah is likened by him to the mother eagle teaching her young brood to fly; alluring them from their eyrie to try their wings, watching their first feeble efforts, hovering over them, ready, if need be, to dart underneath and bear them on her stronger pinions.

Our present brief meditation then, is Israel, and the Israel of the desert of all ages,—subjects of a most gracious discipline and training: guided, supported, safeguarded, by the Eagle-wing of God.

God's Parental Love—the heavenly Fatherhood—is surely a theme of themes in the midst of trial.

Earth's most sacred relation has its archetype in the Divine. A father's or mother's tenderest thoughts are centred in their weak and suffering child. The strong and vigorous of the family are left to care for themselves. It is the fragile flower, bent with hurricane and storm, that engrosses deepest affection and sympathy. So is it with our Father in heaven. It is the child of sorrow on whom He chiefly lavishes His regards. It was the "*sick one*" whom "Jesus loved." He took the *blind* man "by the hand." He was "moved with compassion" when He met the funeral crowd, and spoke words of solace and condolence to *the bereft widow*. At the sight of His own deeply afflicted mother He forgot for the moment His own pangs. His last deed and word was to dry her tears and provide for her a home (John xix. 26). The Shepherd in the parable left the ninety and nine which were safely folded. He deemed it unnecessary to keep watch and ward over *them*. It was for the footsore and weary wanderer, away up amid the thorny brakes and jagged rocks, that he subjected Himself to toil and peril. "I will seek that which was lost, and bring again that which was driven away, and will bind up that which was broken, and will strengthen that which was sick . . . and they shall dwell safely in the wilderness, and sleep in the woods" (Ezek. xxxiv. 16, 25).

Reader,—in the midst, it may be, of mysterious dealings,—dismissing all servile fear, delight to think of this (paradoxical as the words we have oft repeated in these pages may appear), "Whom the Lord *loveth* He *chasteneth.*" "What son is he whom *the Father* chasteneth not?" Chastisement --the family badge—the family pledge—the family privilege. Delight to dwell on that great, that greatest revelation of Christ. The saying may be taken as the brightest emanation from the Fiery Pillar:—"*My Father and your Father;* My God, and your God." My Father! It was the anodyne mixed in the Redeemer's own cup in Gethsemane. "This cup which *My Father* giveth Me to drink, shall I not drink it?" My Father! it is the one name which fetches back the prodigal and sings him home. So in seasons of severest discipline, submission is best attained when chastisement puts the yearning prayer into heart and lip, "I will arise and go to my Father." "Even so, Father." My Father! it is the key which unlocks many perplexities in life. My Father! it is the lullaby which smoothes the pillow of pain and soothes to sweetest rest. It is the requiem in the hour of death:—"Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit." Here is a filial prayer: go forth to the desert with it on your lips; hear the response in your night of gloom and sadness:—

"The way is dark, my Father! Cloud on cloud
Is gathering thickly o'er my head, and loud
The thunders roar above me. See, I stand
Like one bewildered! Father, take my hand.

"The way is dark, my child! but leads to light;
I would not have thee always walk by sight;
My dealings now thou canst not understand,
I meant it so; but I will take thy hand.

* * * * *

"The way is long, my Father! and my soul
Longs for the rest and quiet of the goal.
While yet I journey through this weary land,
Keep me from murmuring; Father, take my hand.

"The way is long, my child! but it shall be
Not one step longer than is best for thee;
And thou shalt know at last, when thou shalt stand
Safe at the end, *how I did take thy hand.*"

Reader, with the hand of a Father-God in yours, and yours in His, rejoice in the double assurance, alike under the shadow of the Pillar of cloud and the gleam of the Pillar of fire,—"Thou compassest my path" (in the daytime), "and my lying down" (the vigils of night). Implicitly rely on the *methods* of His guidance. His one object in all is to bring you nearer Himself; and even if there be the removal of prized blessings, be assured there is a "needs-be." "You may accuse me," says the Duchesse de Gontaut, in her impressive Memoirs, "of making too light of all vicissitudes. You would be wrong. God has simply endowed me

with the faculty of making the best of His severest inflictions: and I believe this to be the surest proof of real faith and the only way of living through life without repining." Oh for the trust and ready implicit submission of the Father of the Faithful, of whom it is said, "he rose up early in the morning"; as if eager to fulfil, be what it might, the bidding of his God! Instead of murmuring at the tardy lifting of the cross, seek to bear meekly your mystery of pain or of sorrow. We are apt to be hasty and impatient; to marvel at protracted suffering and baffled hopes. All God's dealings are slow. An earthly father's education of his child is necessarily gradual and prolonged. The child feels the tardiness. There are tears shed over hard tasks, and restiveness under what appears redundant toil and effort. But there is wise discipline in all these mental and moral struggles. Our Heavenly Father has the same end in view:—"He, for our profit:"—"Then do we with patience wait for it." Let every murmur be suppressed with the Master's words, "If ye (earthly fathers), being evil (imperfect—often erring), know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to them that ask Him?" (Matt. vii. 11).

It is difficult—almost impossible—often to own all this—to see wisdom and love, "good things,"

in what seem strange, regarded as paternal dealings. But ever fall back on the truth that the best and noblest lives have been moulded by affliction: the purest gold is brought forth from the fining process in the furnace. It was the alabaster vase in New Testament story, shivered and broken, that yielded precious ointment and diffused sweetest fragrance. How many of God's afflicted family can give the attestation:—It was trial that braced me for duty and service. Trial was the *Campus martius* where I was disciplined as a soldier in the use of spiritual weapons: taught how to put on "the whole armour of God" that I might be able to stand in the evil day, and having done all to stand. "It was good for me that I was so afflicted, for before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep Thy word!" The homestead has been pillaged, but the pillaging of the earthly nest has driven to the wing and to heavenly soarings. As it is the famine, and crippled resources, which form the main impelling motives of the emigrant to seek other climes and shores, so it is affliction which often colonises the spiritual kingdom.

Trust parental love. In words suggested by one of our motto-symbols—

"Let Thy angel-wings be spread
O'er me; keep me close to Thee:
In the peace Thy love doth shed
Let me dwell eternally!"

"What," says Bishop Hall, "if property, credit, health, friends, and relatives were all lost; thou hast a Father in heaven." And if these fatherly dealings are not at the time apparent—if the writings be now blotted, undecipherable; rather, if we in our nonage are only spelling out our Father's cabalistic words,—"cryptograms"—with key and lexicon; the meaning strange:—the time will come, when all shall be made plain: erasures restored: *lacunæ* supplied: involved passages interpreted. Many a needed translation of what has been long to us like a foreign language, will be rendered in "Heaven's Vernacular": the motto on every title-page of the volumes - too often blurred and faded now, made luminous then—"LIKE AS A FATHER PITIETH HIS CHILDREN." It is said of the seventy translators of the Old Testament into Greek (the Septuagint), who were shut up to accomplish their task by one of the Ptolemies in the Island of Pharos (the Island associated with the famous lighthouse), that though each occupied a separate apartment, on issuing forth from their seclusion, the translations were to a word identical. It will be so in Heaven with God's translated *Providences.* However diverse may be the rendering at times here, there will be no divergence from the united testimony in that true "Land of LIGHT"—"He hath

done all things well" (Mark vii. 37). "For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away. . . . Now we see through a glass darkly; but then face to face" (1 Cor. xiii. 9, 10, 12).

> "Leaflets, now unpaged and scattered,
> Time's great library receives;
> When Eternity shall bind them,
> Golden volumes we shall find them,
> God's light falling on the leaves."

Yes, His ways may be past finding out; but confident that there are blessings in reversion, blessings in disguise, surrender yourself to His wiser, better guidance, with faith's impassioned prayer, "Bless me, even me also, *O my Father!*" The response will in due time come. It is already yours—the Pillar-flash lights up the barren wilderness:—

"I WILL BE A FATHER UNTO YOU, AND YE SHALL BE MY SONS AND DAUGHTERS, SAITH THE LORD ALMIGHTY."

FIFTEENTH DAY.

ABOUNDING GRACE

"The Lord went before them by night in a pillar of fire."

"My grace is sufficient for thee: for My strength is made perfect in weakness."—2 Cor. xii. 9.

"And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work."—2 Cor. ix. 8.

WHAT could we do, in the midst of the thick darkness of trial, but for the sustaining grace of Christ?

Like the great Apostle, who tells his experience in our first motto-verse, we plead with God for the removal of some affliction,—"the thorn in the flesh sent to buffet us" (xii. 7). The prayer is answered, the succour is vouchsafed; but not in the way we asked for, or expected. The lacerating spine is still left—the trial or bereavement, whatever it be, is permitted to continue. The God, however, who sent the trial—yes, who *sent* the trial—for observe the special word of the Apostle, "there was *given* me a thorn in the flesh (v. 7),—He who appointed the trial and still retains it, bestows what HE deems preferable. He imparts compensating grace enabling us to endure the smart. To borrow an illustration from the name of our volume; the Israelites, soon after the commencement of the desert march, gave vent to bitter complaint. Their cry was to be delivered from a prolonged wilderness journey, to terminate days of scorching heat and nights of

chill and darkness. 'Remove the thorn. Take us back, either to the waters and palm-groves of Egypt; or else, by some easier and shorter route, conduct us to the Land of Promise.' God answers their prayer: not as they would have desired. He continues the long, lonely, dreary road for the space of forty years. But He bestows the better equivalent, not for their good only, but to be a spiritual lesson for His Church in all coming ages. He gives the symbol and pledge of His own immediate presence. He spreads over their camp a canopy of cloud by day. He lights up a pillar of fire by night. He would teach them the far higher truth of realising their dependence on Him. Weak, wavering, helpless in themselves, at the mercy of a thousand hostile forces and influences, (inhospitable nature combined with the assaults of desert foes,)—"He led forth His own people like sheep, and guided them in the wilderness like a flock. He commanded the skies above, and opened the doors of heaven. He rained down manna upon them to eat, and gave them of the corn of heaven. . . . Man did eat angels' food" (Psalm lxxviii. 52, 23, 24, 25, R.V.). In other words, the answer to their importunate pleadings was given in the language of our New Testament assurance, "My grace is sufficient for thee: for My strength is made perfect in weakness."

All this is suggestive, too, of *severest* affliction. The Apostle's emblem points to trial in its acutest form. Those who have travelled in Eastern lands know what "the thorn" is. Paul could fetch his figure from early memories by the banks of the Cydnus and the Tarsus Valley, as well as from many subsequent scenes of travel where the same tree was abundant. Very different is it from what is familiar to us at home. The spikes, at once larger and stronger, always recalled to the present writer what must have been the anguish of that thorny crown which circled the brow of the Man of Sorrows. Indeed the original word (σκόλοψ) may, according to some, imply the intenser form of suffering which points to those stakes or iron prongs employed at times by barbarous conquerors to mangle the bodies of the vanquished (R.V. margin).

Afflicted one, your present trial may in no figurative, but very real sense, be one of exceptional severity: the iron may have entered into your soul. God's method of dealing is still the same as with St. Paul. The Shepherd of Israel, who "led Joseph like a flock," has some great end in view in the sending and continuance of the lacerating thorn. He designs life to be a scene and season of discipline. The word more than once translated in the Epistles "judgment" really means "training,"

"education." He is educating you in His school, as He did Israel under the sheen of the Pillar. His dealings—the acutest and most mysterious, are not arbitrary—capricious. He knows what is best. "The sufferings from which He could not deliver us He has transfigured for us. They are no longer penal, but remedial and penitential. Pain has become the chastisement of a Father who loves us: and Death the passage into His very presence" (*Lyttleton*). The thorn which you would fain remove He sees meet to continue; the sombre cloud in which He enfolds you, He delays or refuses to rim with the silver lining. "I will give you," says He, "better than the removal of either thorn or cloud: 'Strengthen ye the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees. Say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong: fear not. . . . In the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert. And the parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water' (Isa. xxxv. 3, 4, 6, 7)." He knows you too well, He loves you too well, to give the nest without the thorn. That very discipline begets trust. Like Alpine travellers we grope our way tremulously along the yawning crevasse and rugged moraine, and through the misty darkness. But His purpose and design is that we may be led to cling only more unfalteringly to the hand of the

wise, unerring Guide, and to feel that He is equal to all emergencies. The wilderness is dark: but the darkness only brings into brighter relief and setting the beacon-glory of the Pillar. The good poet, lately departed, seems, in his "Light to be felt," to write under its gleam :—

"We older children grope our way
From dark behind to dark before:
And only when our hands we lay,
Dear Lord, in Thine, the night is day,
And there is darkness nevermore.

"Reach downwards to the sunless days,
Where human guides are blind as we,
And faith is small and hope delays;
Take Thou the hands of prayer we raise,
And let us feel the *Light of Thee!*"

Bunyan's Pilgrim trembled as he passed with dripping garments through the Slough of Despond. But why his plight? It was because he saw not, or, for the moment refused to see and to use the stepping stones close by, provided by the King of the Way. So are we guilty too often of disregarding the stepping stones of God's Promises. We plunge, in our despondency, into "the miry clay," when He would set our feet upon the solid Rock.

Then, further, ponder our companion motto-verse with its wealth of provision and promise :—"all grace"—"abounding"—"all-sufficiency"—"suffici-

ency in all things." "What an illimitable balance," to use an old writer's comment on the words, "have we here, in the bank of heaven!" What a sure pledge that, as the Shepherd of Israel, He will keep sleepless "watch over the flock *by night*";—never leave the shorn lamb to the untempered winds of trial, or suffer His faithfulness to fail. He afflicts "in measure": not imposing on His people burdens too heavy to carry. "There hath no temptation taken you but such as man can bear: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation make also the way of escape that ye may be able to endure it" (1 Cor. x. 13, R.V.). "For myself," says one whose saintliness has stirred the pulses of the century, "now, at the end of a long life, I say from a full heart that God has never failed me; never disappointed me; has ever turned evil into good for me . . . and what He has been to me who have deserved His love so little, such He will be, I believe and know, to every one who does not repel Him, and turn from His pleadings."

Do not misinterpret or misunderstand the way in which the promised grace is given. It does not come with a torrent, in rain-floods or water-floods. Submission is evolved gradually. As with the prophet of old, we often cannot all at once

recognise spiritual helps and forces, or we refuse to do so. The evening star glimmers at first imperceptibly in the twilight. Our fields, at first, only show patches of struggling verdure. So also with resignation, the pre-eminent grace in trial, "Nevertheless, afterward," (Heb. xii. 11), like the after-glow of Egypt with which the Israelites were so familiar, is God's principle and method. Not all at once, with impetuous rush, is the stranded vessel moved. But as tidal wave after wave comes rolling in, the inert mass seems to wake up to the sound of many waters. Gradually the conquest is made; and in due time, with white wings outspread, she is once more buoyant on summer seas. Thus is it with the tidal wave of God's love in a time of affliction. The agitated, shattered, stranded heart is gradually swayed by an influence above. In this, as in other things, "he that believeth shall not make haste."

Reader, God, in His infinite, mysterious wisdom, has seen meet to touch you in your tenderest part. The world is changed to you. You have, indeed, the same old environments. You feel yourself plodding on in the old mechanical way: life and its exacting duties cannot be evaded. But, *Ichabod!* its glory has departed. Yes, true, and yet not true. If your sun has gone down in the darkness of bereavement and death, that is the time for the

lighting of the Pillar and for the bright unfoldings of grace.

"I lay, with heaven's cold night above,
Upon a couch of stone;
I said, 'O Lord, if Thou art love
Why am I left alone?'
And there I heard the answer fall,
'My love itself is all in all.'"

Sacred Songs.

His end is surely a noble and elevated one, "If so be that we suffer with Him, that we may be also glorified together" (Rom. viii. 17). "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, *worketh* for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." "Worketh." The great Workman with the tools of affliction sifts the quartz and *débris* and dross, in order to get the grains of gold which are subsequently fashioned into "the crown of glory that fadeth not away." Trial is the golden rod measuring the wall of the New Jerusalem. Trial is the golden gate leading into its eternal Temple. Trial is the means—the chief means—employed in assimilating the soul to God, and imprinting on it the Divine lineaments. "This honour have all His saints" (Psalm cxlix. 9). "Most gladly, therefore," says St. Paul (2 Cor. xii. 9), speaking of his unremoved thorn, and borrowing also a metaphor from the desert Pillar with its cloudy curtain-canopy—"will I rather glory in my

infirmities, that the power of Christ may (literally) spread its tabernacle over me" (R.V. margin).

> "To be made with Thee one in spirit,
> Is the boon that I lingering ask;
> To have no bar 'twixt my soul and Thine;
> My thoughts to echo Thy will Divine:
> Myself Thy servant for any task."
>
> *L. Larcom.*

"When He hath tried me I shall come forth as gold" (Job xxiii. 10).

"BUT THE GOD OF ALL GRACE, WHO HATH CALLED US UNTO HIS ETERNAL GLORY BY CHRIST JESUS, AFTER THAT YE HAVE SUFFERED A WHILE, MAKE YOU PERFECT, STABLISH, STRENGTHEN, SETTLE YOU" (1 PETER. v. 10).

SIXTEENTH DAY.

ONLY BELIEVE.

'The Lord went before them by night in a pillar of fire."

"Only believe."—MARK v. 36.

"Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God?"—JOHN xi. 40.

COMFORTING and inspiring words these! even though we may accept them in the shape of tender rebukes addressed to the smitten heart.

How apt are we, in dark dealings, to impeach and distrust the Divine faithfulness! To sight and sense present trial is often utterly baffling:—premature sickness, suffering, heartache, death. Reason stands aghast, as prop after prop on which we had leant gives way. We had heard of His "footsteps of love"; but "His way is in the sea, and His path in the great waters." Life, but yesterday, was bright alike with memories and anticipations; now a sudden fog "blurs the splendour of the sun." But yesterday it was a fair garden—an earthly Eden with bud and blossom and ripening fruit, cool alcove, and sheltering bower. Now it is like the garden of old, "within it a sepulchre" (John xix. 41). A blight has passed over,—flowers and gourd have withered. The Fiery Pillar is there, but its ruddy glow seems no longer the fire of mercy, but the scorching flame of judgment. "Men see not the bright light in the clouds." Leaving figure for reality, the experience of the pilgrim of

sorrow is summed up and compressed in the dirge of the stricken patriarch—"All these things are against me."

"Only believe," says He who has sent this mysterious chastening. Cowering, like the faithless Elijah of old, in your cave of terror and darkness, you have at first eye and ear for nothing but the wind and the earthquake and the lightning-flash. You leave no room for the gracious sequel of "the still, small voice." That voice will, however, in due time, though it may not be exactly as you expected or wished, mingle its accents with the moanings of the storm:—yes, as surely in your case, as it reached the awestruck prophet of the desert after the wilderness-symbols of judgment had passed by. It may, I repeat, be deferred. Hour after hour of the night-watches may pass, and the Laureate's refrain may again and again be whispered with trembling lips, "He cometh not, she said!" The Bethany sisters may stand, in the extremity of their grief, from break of morn to dewy eve and pensive starlight, straining their eyes across to the far mountains of Perea; theirs the same impassioned monotone,—one wailing in response to the other—

> "She only said, the day is dreary,
> He cometh not, she said!"

But the day was not to be dreary. The night

was not to be weary. He *was* coming; He did come! And standing, as you may be doing, on the spot where the symbols of mortality brought tears to His eyes, He spake gentle accents of reproof,—"Hush, doubting heart! Said I not unto thee that, if thou wouldest *believe*, thou shouldest see the glory of God?" There was no more dreariness now in that replenished home. The festal gathering and the alabaster box of precious nard testified to the gratitude felt by re-united hearts. The Pillar of Fire, whose glow seemed so lately to be removed for ever, was relighted. They believed and trusted, and worshipped and adored!

He has some infinite reason for all He does. Our true Joseph, when at times appearing to "speak harshly" to his brethren, does so in undertones of dissembled love. Shall we not trust "that same Jesus"? Pointing to the double motto-verse, may we not chide unbelief, and say, "Remember the word unto Thy servant on which Thou hast caused me to hope"? Apparently frustrated schemes will yet be realised—apparently unanswered prayers will yet be answered, crosses will be exchanged for crowns. God's design and lesson in these sovereign dealings is to teach us patience. "Happiness," my friend, for the present is not—cannot be yours. But there is a better word, a better portion which is a personal possession in all sanctified sorrow. That abiding

treasure is the higher one of *blessedness*. The former is casual, fitful, a thing of times and seasons, and fortunate coincidences. It may be on the wing to-day in the blue of heaven; it may be struggling low in the furrow to-morrow. Carlyle, in one of his aphorisms, thus briefly defines the difference between the two: "The first is often out of our reach; the second may always be present." "*Blessed* is the man that endureth temptation." "*Blessed* are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted." The lesson may be slowly learnt. It is like entering the gloom of an Egyptian temple: at first conscious only of darkness—a great shrine of silence and vacancy. But, by-and-by, as the eye recovers from the glare of outer noontide, the incised sculptures and hieroglyphics become visible, and, with an expert at our side, we can slowly interpret the latter. The buried history of ages and kings stands legibly before us. So God takes us from the fierce glare and dazzle of prosperity into "the Sanctuary of Sorrow." At first all is darkness. There may be mighty revelations all around, but the blinded eye fails to trace their outlines or decipher their legends. It is the prophet's experience—"walking in darkness and can see no light" (Isa. l. 10). Gradually in the deep, shaded recesses, first dimly, but soon with no uncertain disclosure, there comes forth, as of old at Belshazzar's

feast, a "writing on the walls of the king's palace." The spiritual vision is opened, the inner eye is trained and purified to "see God." Like Job in his gloomy crypt of sorrow the afflicted one is led to say, "I have heard of Thee with the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth Thee" (Job xlii. 5). "The strange lines," says a writer who uses the same emblem, "which seemed at first so meaningless, will group themselves into shapes and forms of purposeful design" (Illingworth). Thus will the words of the great Apostle have their best illustration within these gateways of trial, in the temple-halls of suffering and pain and bereavement. "Our light affliction" will in due time have its "far more exceeding and eternal weight (and revelation) of glory." "In Thy light shall we see light."

Robert Browning, in the epilogue to his last poem—what may be regarded as his swan-song—his farewell utterance of religious hope—speaks of one

> "Who never doubted clouds would break
> Never dreamed, though right were
> Worsted, wrong would triumph.
> Held, we fall to rise, are baffled to fight better,
> Sleep to wake."

We may quote an older, nobler minstrel still. Not long ago, the writer of these lines happened to attend the morning service—always impressive

—in Canterbury Cathedral during a passing visit. The anthem for the day was a singularly pathetic balm-word for the broken spirit. Its "concord of sweet sounds" was like a serenade of ministering angels. Psalm xxvii. 16 (the Prayer Book version): —"*O tarry thou the Lord's leisure: be strong, and He shall comfort thine heart; and put thou thy trust in the Lord.*" What an "Eirenicon!" Oh for this tarrying spirit: the "only believe" of our motto-verse! Though it were but the lisping of a Scotch child—the best definition of faith I ever knew is in that child's simple quaint words—"Bide a wee, and dinna fear." "Bide," it is the term equivalent for "Wait on the Lord, and be of good courage."

And if that answer be not now vouchsafed the day is coming when it shall. In the retrospect from "the golden altar which is before the throne," glorified lips will rehearse the hallowed earthly words, giving them a heavenly and eternal meaning. "Said I not unto thee, if thou wouldest *believe* thou shouldest *see*?"

"YE NOW THEREFORE HAVE SORROW: BUT I WILL SEE YOU AGAIN, AND YOUR HEART SHALL REJOICE, AND YOUR JOY NO MAN TAKETH FROM YOU."

SEVENTEENTH DAY.

THE GREAT SYMPATHISER.

"The Lord went before them by night in a pillar of fire."

"For in that He Himself hath suffered being tempted, He is able to succour them that are tempted."—HEB. ii. 18.

"I know their sorrows."—EXOD. iii. 7.

"In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world."—JOHN xvi. 33.

HE suffered! Sorrowing one, what a gleam of the Pillar-cloud is this!

He suffered! What are all thy most agonising afflictions compared with what He endured for Thee!

He suffered—poverty, weariness, privation, hunger, thirst, grief, and the minor other ills that flesh is heir to. These, however, were but the surface-heavings of the deeper depths of woe:—the assaults of men and the malignity of devils, cruel innuendoes, savage indignities; the loss or desertion of beloved friends; the treachery of trusted associates: that, too, in the case of a nature sensitively strung alike physically and spiritually. "Reproach," said He, "hath broken My heart."

He suffered more profoundly still. There was a mystery of anguish in Gethsemane which mortal tongue cannot tell, or imagination conceive. No wonder it is described with an emphasis belonging to no other—"THE *Agony*." Its undefined awfulness is worded in the Greek Litany by "Thy sufferings *known* and *unknown*." What mean these

drops of blood oozing from His brow? What means the thrice-uttered prayer, in a paroxysm of woe, "Let this cup pass from Me"? (Matt. 26-39). What means the climax and consummation of all, when the very sun, in the words of Jeremy Taylor, "put on sackcloth, as if ashamed to confront the spectacle of its expiring Creator": when the wail was evoked from parched and dying lips—the bitterest cry that ever rose from earth to heaven—"My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me"?

He suffered. Of Him alone could the words be said—"All Thy waves and Thy billows have gone over me." Well may He have addressed the question, first to His disciples and then to His suffering children of all ages—"Can ye drink of the cup which I drink of, and be baptised with the baptism that I am baptised with?" With an intense pathos of which the afflicted patriarch knew nothing, He could make the appeal to a whole world of weepers, "Have pity upon me, have pity upon me, O ye, my friends, for the *hand of God* hath touched me!" (Job xix. 21).

He suffered. But the lesson from these sufferings for you and for me is to watch how, in this Cimmerian gloom, shone the Pillar of Fire! See His perfect and profound resignation! He takes the cup, whatever that mystic emblem may mean, with

trembling hand. Humanity in its weakness, rather humanity in its very strength, utters an "If it be possible"—the prayer of His suffering children still—"let it pass." But it is only for the moment. The bitter chalice is drained to the dregs. Three times He recedes from the edge of the abyss and its "horror of great darkness." But it is a momentary recoil—no more. He plunges in! Self-surrender, heroic obedience, unmurmuring submission can go no farther. His own will is now, as ever, coincident with the Divine—"Not as I will, but as Thou wilt." He ceases not in the prolonged conflict till He could utter the cry waited for by all time, and which sends its prolonged echoes through eternity—"It is finished!"

Though we have selected the closing hour of all, He was, during the entire period of His earthly life, "the Faithful and True *Martyr*" (Rev. i. 5). Well may a writer speak of "the fascination of that mournful life-story, so infinite in its pathos and so profound in its wisdom, the most touching of idylls and the most impressive of tragedies . . . the loving and gracious Man of Sorrows, listening to every plaint of weakness and helping every troubled heart to bear its burden, even while on His own there rested the burden of a world's salvation" (*Present Day Religion*, p. 201).

Reader, I know not what the circumstances of

your suffering are. More than probable they may be identical in kind, though not in degree, with those of your suffering Lord.

(1) They may be *physical.* As was noted at greater length in a previous chapter, it is only those conversant with a couch of lingering pain who can testify to the reality. The sudden close of the windows, long open to the cheering light of day; the drawn blinds; the tossing from side to side in the hopeless battle with wakefulness—opiates giving, at the best, transient moments of relief—only to renew the pitiless struggle: "Saying in the morning, 'Would God it were evening!' and in the evening, 'Would God it were morning!'" That pain—that physical pain—on the Cross, *He suffered!* There were, as I have just said, other reasons of infinitely more tremendous significance which convulsed His *soul.* But one reason for His being subjected to the pangs of an agonised *body*, undoubtedly was, that He might impart to every child of anguish His own experimental exalted sympathy. In our hours of prostration, weakness, and weariness—when in their prolonged vigils we may be tempted at times "to faint when we are rebuked of Him," the whisper trembling on parched lips—"Why all this discipline of pain? Why this cruel cross to bear? Where is the wisdom? Where is the love?"—we may think of a Divine fellow-sufferer

subjected without any mitigation—(for the very anodyne offered was refused)—to the intensest bodily torture. "Consider Him that endured . . . lest ye be weary and faint in your minds" (Heb. xii. 3).

(2) Your sufferings may be *mental.* Harassment, unkindness, ingratitude, the barbed shafts of malice and slander, all the more grievous to bear if sent winged from the quiver of a friend. It may be anxiety about a beloved relative, the subject of slow disease, around whose couch the too ominous shadows are gathering :—"life balanced in a breath." It may be the agony of bereavement, when the long alternations of hope and fear have ended—the vacant niche in your heart—the vacant chair in your home—the cherished name on the gravestone. Or, it may be, in your own case, wasting disease too surely pointing to the fatal termination—this involving the severance of holiest ties, and leaving dear ones solitary and alone to do battle with adversity. These and many such, though varying in their outer form and complexion, your great suffering Master knew in their fullest measure. Yes, inclusive of the last-mentioned; when, Himself racked in agony, He had that agony intensified by the sight of a fond mother jostled amid the crowd that surged around, and made sport of His dying moments; the sword too

truly piercing her own heart, as the nails were lacerating the Body at whose feet she crouched.

The refrain of the present meditation is, *He suffered*; and *because* He suffered, says the Apostle in our motto-verse, "He is able to succour." We have quoted more than once, as suggested by the name of this book, the words which emanated from the Jehovah of the Pillar-cloud, the opening syllables in that drama of the Exodus and the desert; let them be repeated in their most appropriate form here: "I have seen, I have seen the affliction of My people, for I know their sorrows." His whole life, from Bethlehem's manger to Calvary's cross, formed a pathetic comment and fulfilment. He knew—He knows, every heart-throb of His suffering Israel in every age. He is no god or demi-god of Pagan mythology, who lives in unsympathetic isolation amid the clouds of Olympus, all in ignorance of the travail of a sin-stricken, woe-worn world. From deepest experience He is cognisant of every pang that rends the soul. If one of earth's kingdoms is the *Kingdom of Sorrow*, He is its King. The crown on His head was a crown of thorns, and, being so, the sceptre in His hand is the sceptre of kingly sympathy. It is recorded of Alexander the Great, that he touched with his crown a wounded soldier in the ranks, and that at the touch there were the tinglings of new life.

It is so in a diviner, heavenly sense. Christ touches our wounds with His double crown,—the crown of thorns as the Human Sympathiser, and the crown of glory as Head over all. It is the thorn-crown which forms the special theme of our present meditation. I always like the conjunction of the two clauses in the familiar Litany—"Pitifully behold the sorrows of our hearts. . . . O Son of David, have mercy upon us!" It was the Lord of the Pillar-cloud, the God-Man, of whom it is touchingly said, "So He was their Saviour. In all their afflictions He was afflicted, and the angel of His presence saved them: in His love and in His pity He redeemed them, and He bare them, and carried them all the days of old" (Isa. lxiii. 8, 9). "It is Christ alone," beautifully says Père Didon, in his *Life of Jesus*, "who teaches the joy of suffering, because it is He alone who pours into the soul a Divine life which no pain can overwhelm; which trial only strengthens, and which can despise death, because it permits us to face it with the fulness of immortal hope."

My brother, trust this Great Sympathiser, "who, for the joy that was set before Him, *endured the Cross*." Conquer as He conquered, by a noble submission and self-surrender to the will of your Father in heaven. While you take trial for granted as a part of His appointed discipline, hear the

Lord of sorrow encouraging you from His own example and victory:—"In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." We read of Him that "being in an agony He prayed the more earnestly." "Who in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto Him that was able to save Him from death, and was heard (as it has been rendered) because of His reverent submission" (Heb. v. 7). Is not that saying impressive—"*He became obedient unto death*"? It was a *gradual* effort requiring Divine self-sacrifice. But it was given, and the triumph was assured. Let this, too, afflicted one, be the sanctified result, in your case, of the Cup which the same Father has put into your hands. "Be more courageous," are the words of St. Francis de Sales, "in your trials, cherish them carefully, and thank God for vouchsafing to give you ever so small a share in His dear Son's cross."

"REJOICE INASMUCH AS YE ARE PARTAKERS OF CHRIST'S SUFFERINGS; THAT WHEN HIS GLORY SHALL BE REVEALED, YE MAY BE GLAD ALSO WITH EXCEEDING JOY."

EIGHTEENTH DAY.

PILGRIMS AND STRANGERS.

"The Lord went before them by night in a pillar of fire."

"And confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. . . . But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for He hath prepared for them a City."—HEB. xi. 13, 16.

THOUGH really spoken of the older patriarchs these verses would seem as if uttered under the gleam of the Pillar-cloud. They might have formed the refrain in the Song of Israel for forty years in their desert.

"Pilgrims and strangers on the earth!" This opening clause, applicable to believers in all ages, is no morbid sentiment. The Christian is not a pessimist. God's child, pilgrim and wayfarer though he be, has bright experiences in "the house of his pilgrimage." He comes to Zion, not with dirges, but with songs (Isa. xxxv. 10). He is feelingly alive to the wealth of loveliness in the surrounding world. It belies the name often given to it of "Valley of Tears." None more than he, none so truly as he, in the contemplation of the glowing firmament by day and the silver galaxy by night,

> "Can lift to Heaven an unpresumptuous eye,
> And smiling say, My Father made them all."

And yet it is not inconsistency to affirm,—it would be vain to deny, that in the hour of sorrow

all undergoes a gloomy transformation. Affliction has its exceptional teachings. God's fair earth then seen through tearful eyes, is draped in sadness. It wears not bridal attire, but funeral weed. And the lesson so reluctantly listened to in the day of prosperity, with its sunshine, is urged with irresistible power on the broken heart,—"I am a stranger with thee, and a sojourner as all my fathers were!" The harp of a thousand strings is rendered tuneless :—the light of life goes out, like the stars fading from the sky. Job was no born hypochondriac. On the contrary, his heart, in its normal condition, was full of brightness and thankfulness. Read his pathetic story. No eye had a keener relish for the grand and beautiful in nature. He revels in "the philosophy of the seasons." The keener were his sympathies, that he saw God's footsteps and felt God's touch, in all. But can we wonder that this "Prince of the East," dowered with the three best gifts—goodness, intellect, and piety, when stricken in soul and body, realised as he had never done before, that Time was "a walking shadow"; and that he is heard wailing out the monotone, "Man that is born of a woman is of few days and full of trouble. He cometh forth like a flower, and is cut down : he fleeth also as a shadow, and continueth not" (Job xiv. 1, 2). In a word, "he confessed that he was a stranger and pilgrim on the earth."

The time indeed (and thank God for it) will come, *must* come, when the cloud is lifted; when you will even feel the reviving influences of nature and yield to the claim and attraction of human interests. But meanwhile, all is "sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought." The way cannot be traversed with gleaming eye and elastic step when the staff is broken and the beautiful rod.

It is, therefore, in no spirit of murmuring or rebellion, that we repeat the first entry in this meditation. Let us rather look at it as lighted up by the sanctity of the Pillar of Fire. Reader, in that lurid flame, God,—the God who has seen meet severely to chasten,—would lead you, it may be through tears of anguish and a rifled home, to confess your *homelessness*. But it would be a poor, unworthy result of family trial, were it simply to discover the blight that has passed over your being and surroundings. The passage which forms our theme does not confine itself to gazing on the cloud. It has a glorious counterpart. There is a rift in the sky, disclosing the blue eternities behind and beyond. The down-cast pilgrim when he most deeply realises that he is *but* a pilgrim, is inspired with noble resolves — stimulated with brighter prospects. The Song of the Night merges into a Song of Eternal Day. It is the grandest possible result of trial:—"*But* NOW (the sequence of

affliction) *they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly.*"

Oh most blessed fruit and result of the Divine dealings! The sorrowing present not obscuring or shrouding, but only lending brightness and glory to the future! The wear and tear of life,—many petty cares it may be, wedded with far deeper sorrows,—unspoken trials, anxieties, and responsibilities previously unknown. "Hill Difficulties," which before had their arbours and hospices, now one toilsome ascent; rugged steep and treacherous hollow, bewildering mist and storm-cloud. It was but recently balmy seas, now it is winter with fog and snowstorm, needing anxious pilotage. Worst and saddest of all, the oppressive *silence* in the dark empty halls of grief. "One there is not," rings dolefully at every turn. What you thought to be a fixed star is changed into meteor-gleam, vanished as a morning cloud, or like the bubble on the ocean. Yes, let none cynically deny you your newly-appropriated name, "Pilgrims and strangers." *They* can see no wilderness, because they have still their unshattered tents and bivouac fires, and undiminished circle to surround them. Can it be wondered at that the song of their encampment can get no response in yours?

Turn, however, now, your contemplation to the obverse side. If bereavement and death have read

their own impressive homily, there is a contrasted view to those afflictions which "for the present are not joyous but grievous." God's end and the soul's good is attained, if the breaking up of the temporary desert home quickens the onward march; lip and heart attuned to the resolve, "Now we desire a better country, that is, an heavenly!" But for that trial, you might have forgotten that the wilderness was *not* your final rest or portion. You might otherwise have permitted fond fibres of affection to root you to earth. You might have continued in the pursuit of tinted air-bubbles;—like one of Bunyan's well-known characters in his dream, preferring feathers and dust to the beckoning angel and the gleaming crown,—dimming your eye to "the Better Country."

God has, in mercy, shut out the garish noontide, and lighted up His own fiery column with its own golden splendour. He has illuminated it with the words which you can turn, in all time to come, into a pilgrim chant,—a "song of degrees," like one of those used by the Jews in going up to their greatest Feast, "*God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He hath prepared for them a city.*" Your affliction has brought Heaven nearer. It has served to wean from the too alluring fascinations of the present. It has forged adamantine chains to link you to the unseen and eternal. If some who read

these pages can tell of successive bereavements,—they have peopled the once strange, silent, solitary Land with living souls. Angels and glorified spirits seem to wave signals of welcome. It has made the other world more of a home than this :—

> "We dream awhile that Home is Heaven;
> We learn at last that Heaven is Home."

Happy those who can thus conjoin the two correlated Bible sentences, "Pilgrims and strangers on the earth," "Our Citizenship is in Heaven" (Phil. iii 20); who can listen under desert skies to words of heart-cheer, "Upwards, Onwards, Heavenwards, Homewards!" I like the words in the Revised Version of 2 Cor. v. 8, "We are of good courage, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be *at home* with the Lord."

In heathen mythology (the legend is one of the oldest of Greek antiquity), Prometheus, represented by Æschylus "as an immortal god and friend of the human race—willing to sacrifice himself for their salvation," was said to bring down two gifts from heaven,—viz., *Fire* and *Hope*. In an infinitely more real sense, as our double motto-verse unfolds, the true Prometheus—the Son of the Highest—Himself the Divine Sacrifice, "brought down FIRE for the Pillar-cloud in the night of earth." Along with this He has brought HOPE, "the hope full

of immortality,"—the promised bliss of that world where darkness is changed to light and hope to full fruition:—where the winter is for ever past, the rain over and gone, nothing left but eternal summer for the soul.

Pilgrim of sorrow, recognise your afflictions to be ladder-steps to help you in reaching the Gate of the City. It was the beautiful saying of young Prince Otto of Wied, brother to the Queen of Roumania, who endured with such heroic Christian fortitude—"More than we can bear is not sent us; and when we can bear no longer, the end comes, and we are blest in heaven" (*Life of Carmen Sylva*, p. 62). Yes, "more than we can bear is not sent us": Whatever *is* sent, in the way of pain and suffering and bereavement, *is* God's needed discipline,—God's *best* discipline. The gifts and graces of the Christian have ever been nurtured thereby. To borrow the words of a friend, "In the garden of sorrow the soul's loveliest passion-flowers reach their ideal perfection." The noblest heroes and heroines of the Faith have been braced by "great tribulation." It is often the bruised reeds the Almighty converts into golden arrows for His quiver.

Go, then, up and on through the wilderness leaning on your Beloved. Keep in sight the guiding night Pillar. Be loyal to God, as a son whom He

chasteneth, and He will be faithful to the resigned and trusting heart. So may it be said of you, day by day, and never more than on the last day of all,—life's vesper bell ringing the words,—

"THERE IS SPRUNG UP A LIGHT FOR THE RIGHTEOUS, AND JOYFUL GLADNESS FOR SUCH AS ARE TRUE-HEARTED."

NINETEENTH DAY.

LIGHT ON THE MORROW.

"The Lord went before them by night in a pillar of fire."

"Take therefore no thought for the morrow."—St. Matt. vi. 34.
"Commit thy way unto the Lord."—Psalm xxxvii. 5.

A DOUBLE voice from the Pillar-cloud, in the midst of your night of sorrow.

Like most trials, I shall suppose that the present one has suddenly overtaken you. An unexpected bolt has descended ; some silver chord has suddenly been loosed ; some golden bowl irreparably broken. You can say of your grief as a true sufferer has simply described it : "It lies down with us at night. It rises with us in the morning." You feel at once out on the stormy billows, away from the harbour where all so lately was peace. You ask, in your first hour of bewilderment, can it really be so ; that the fond vision of years has departed like a scroll ; the favourite life-chord snapped ? "Suddenly are my tents spoiled and my curtains in a moment :" (Jer. iv. 20)—those gone in the twinkling of an eye for "the for ever of time," who, using the words of a distinguished scholar, "in old days it was strength to be with, and for the future it will be strength to remember" (Westcott). But it is, alas ! this very future which is now, all unexpectedly, the perplexing and

pathetic anticipation. Must the light of the Pillar-cloud here be sought for in vain? With these dense impalpable shadows projected without warning on your path, is your only outlook, voiceless solitude—the gloom of the desert by night or its mocking mirage by day; beguiling you into false confidences and disappointing hopes?

"Leave," says Christ, "that morrow with Me." "Take no thought," no needless, over-anxious thought, as the word means, about it. That morrow, under My hand, will reveal itself. Instead of trying vainly in this "hurricane eclipse" to forecast the dusty, travel-stained roads of life,—"Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in Him; and He shall bring it to pass. And He shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noonday. Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him" (Psalm xxxvii. 5, 6, 7).

Reader, do not suppose that nervous, anxious apprehensions about the future, or wonderment at the mysterious dealings of God are in your case exceptional. You remember, how, in a different form, they were experienced and avowed by the typical "Pilgrims of the Night,"—the Hebrew host at the very commencement of their Exodus. Not only was it with them mystery and enigma, but the almost certainty of disaster,

appalling in its suddenness, "They are entangled in the land, the wilderness hath shut them in!" "Surely Thou didst set them in slippery places: Thou castedst them down into destruction. How are they brought into desolation, as in a moment! They are utterly consumed with terrors" (Psalm lxxiii. 18, 19). Even their faithful commander was terror-struck. The column of flame was deflected from what *appeared* the right way,—leading to panic and peril,—the barrier mountains behind, and the raging sea in front. There was nothing but misgiving for the present, and tremulousness for the future. Falling prone to the ground, Moses wails out his plaint and remonstrance. But the God of the covenant host knew better. Accordingly, He answers only in words of righteous rebuke, "Why liest thou on thy face? Speak unto the children of Israel that they go forward." "Commit," as if He said, "that unknown road and unrevealed morrow to Me; I the Lord will go before you; I the God of Israel will be your rereward." "Forward," was the word of command, as the no longer sceptic leader anew grasped his rod and rose in the might of Jehovah. If not then, the day would come in long after years, when the memorial song would be sung,—"He led them forth by *the right way*, that they might go to a city of habitation. Oh that men

would praise the Lord for His goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of men" (Psalm cvii. 7, 8).

Confide in that same assurance. The morrow may doubtless to you, too, be all perplexity. Like a group of desert travellers of a future age,—like the Magi, you may seem suddenly to have lost your guiding star. But, *Jehovah-Jireh* (*the Lord will provide*). Seek to rise above these unworthy morbid forebodings. It is the nature of faith—the *triumph* of faith—to overcome difficulties, to feel assured that in due time the gloomiest cloud will be braided with silver linings.

The disciples at the scene of Transfiguration at first "feared to enter *the cloud*." Ere long when they passed through its enfoldings, the gloom and mystery were dispelled. "They looked unto *Him* and were lightened," for "His face did shine as the Sun." His feet, as they were in an after day seen in Patmos by one of those privileged spectators, would seem "like pillars of *fire*." That glimpse of transfigured glory prepared them for the great impending suffering in Gethsemane and Calvary. They were braced under the shadow of the cloud for the fiery trials that were so soon to try them.

Enter on your veiled future in a similar spirit.

"Stoop not for ever over sorrow's loom
On webs of drear unprofitable gloom,

> Behold the text, writ with the Sun's last hand
> In crimson cypher on the golden sky,
> Proclaiming joyous morrow to the land:
> Then let the soul take comfort."
>
> *After-Glow.*

God gives you in our older type of the Pillar, a similar pledge of safety and rest. He can bring good out of evil, and light out of darkness, and order out of confusion. He can transform the wilderness into an oasis fringed with palms and musical with fountains :—thus fulfilling in a better than its literal sense His own promise, "The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them, and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose."

One of the sweetest of our religious poets would almost seem to have had that "Light of fire" in view, as the lines were written :—

> "For one thing only, Lord, dear Lord, I plead,
> Lead me aright.
> Though strength should falter, and though heart should bleed,
> Through peace to light.
> I do not ask my cross to understand,
> My way to see,—
> *Better in darkness just to feel Thy hand,*
> *And follow Thee.*"

How blessed, we may well add, that the future, so well known to Him, is unknown to us! What a pall would be cast on many a joyous life, had

the power been given (so mercifully witholden) of forecasting it! We are thus spared years of anticipated misery. Never was there a more gracious appointment and provision than that spoken of by St. James, "Ye know not what shall be on the morrow."

> "Accept the present with a thankful heart,
> Nor listen to the tramp of troublous years
> Remembered joy shall soothe, when sorrow's smart
> Turns thy sweet past to tears."

The best and highest thought of all is, that our "destinies,"—our present,—and above all, our future and its unborn hours are "God-appointed." When from His lips the question is propounded, "Is it well with thee?" (that question to which the faithless heart is ever tempted to give an evasive answer)—be it yours, confident in the combined wisdom and love of your Leader, to respond, "It *is* well!"—glorifying Him by meek submission and faithful following. "Shall we presumptuously cross His path? or shall we, like well disciplined soldiers, keep our post and watch for the signals?" (*Newman*). With the change of a word, let us strive to say,—

> "I do not ask to see
> The unveiling of Thy purpose, or the shining
> Of future light on mysteries untwining,
> Thy promise-roll is all my own,
> Thy *Pillar* enough for me."

Chequered though your way may be, He will be at every turning,—soothing adversity,—tempering prosperity. And when that morrow shall itself come to an end, death will be but as a short summer's night pearled with clouds, a momentary overcasting of the heavens,—no more. Life's retrospect will evoke the Angel-Song of Bethlehem, "Glory to God!" Then the light, not of wilderness pillar, but of unsetting suns, "the light that never was on land or sea," will illuminate an endless morrow.

With this glorious reversion, mourner, you may now sing, even it may be amid present blinding grief, one of the inspired "restful rhythms,"—

"NEVERTHELESS I AM CONTINUALLY WITH THEE: THOU HAST HOLDEN ME BY MY RIGHT HAND. THOU SHALT GUIDE ME WITH THY COUNSEL, AND AFTERWARD RECEIVE ME TO GLORY!"

TWENTIETH DAY.

THE POWER OF PRAYER.

"The Lord went before them by night in a pillar of fire."

"Why sayest thou, O Jacob, and speakest, O Israel, My way is hid from the Lord, and my judgment is passed over from my God. Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the Everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary?"—ISA. xl. 27, 28.

"The Lord is good unto them that wait for Him, to the soul that seeketh Him."—LAM. iii. 25.

"*My way is hid from the Lord, and my judgment is passed over from my God.*" Strong, impassioned as are these words, how truthfully they interpret the thoughts of many a sorrowing heart! Yes, of many a *Christian* heart. For, observe, the tender reproach and expostulation is not addressed to the unbeliever, with his sceptic devil-born doubts; but to God's own covenant people,—"Jacob,"—"Israel." Disguise it as we may, in the depths of profound grief, and despite of all accepted dogmas and creeds, such reflections *will* obtrude themselves. "Has not God forgotten me?" 'I adore Him and cling to Him as my Heavenly Father,—it is the assurance I shall be the last to surrender. But why this terrible trial? Where are any footprints of His love? I fail to hear even the faintest tones of the voice from the cloudy Pillar. Life is bereft of its beauty and brightness, and I am called to tread the dreary corridors of death, wedded to sepulchral silence. My prayers are apparently unheard. They only seem to lead from darkness to darkness. Surely He is, like Baal, asleep, leaving me to cry unsuc-

coured in the lonely desert—"My soul thirsteth for Thee, in a dry and weary land, where no water is'" (Psalm lxiii. 1, R.V.). The words of *In Memoriam* seem to speak of me—

"They built him fanes of fruitless prayer."

In vain I make my appeal to the God of the Fiery Column. In vain I plead the memories of the old pilgrim march,—"Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord! . . . Art thou not it which drieth up the sea, the waters of the great deep, that made the depths of the sea a way for the ransomed to pass over?" (Isa. li. 9, 11). I call in the anguish and desertion of despair, "Keep not Thou silence, O God. Hold not Thy peace, and be not still, O God!" (Psalm lxxxiii. 1).'

These, sorrowing one, in your seasons of despondency—it may be even now—are the tones of your muffled harp. Like the Syrophenician woman you eagerly follow the steps of the Great Helper,—seeking deliverance from Him who alone can give it. You can, as little as she did, understand the strange silence, the unheeded appeal, the apparent repulse. Is this like—is it not rather sadly unlike His loving heart? "Surely my way is hid from the Lord,"—might well have been her agonising soliloquy. But the tide of Divine-human sympathy was only for the time pent up and restrained. The

sluices were ere long withdrawn;—her trust was commended; her child restored. The word of the Gracious Consoler was a bequest for the importunate of all ages, "O woman, great is thy faith; be it unto thee even as thou wilt." Call to remembrance, child of affliction, a higher than any mere human experience. Christ could Himself enter into the mystery,—shall I say, the *terribleness* of apparently unheard and unsuccoured prayer. Read that psalm so unquestionably His own; the psalm of the Eloi-cry, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" His tearful pleadings were, "Why art Thou so far from the words of My roaring? O My God, I cry unto Thee in the daytime, but Thou hearest not, and in the night season and I am not silent!" What is His solace and balm-word in that hour of seeming desolation? He rests contented with the assurance, "*But Thou art Holy*" (Psalm xxii. 3). Think, in the midst of your crisis-hours with their silences of grief, how HE traversed this, as well as other solitudes,—how He drank this, as well as other sorrow-brooks by the way (Psalm cx. 7). Under the shade of these moonlit olives, the Master is giving utterance to importunate pleadings. But the cup is not suffered to pass, and that, too, though "being in an agony, He prayed the more earnestly," "BUT, *Thou art Holy*." He will not surrender His confidence in

God,—in His Heavenly Father's righteousness, faithfulness, and truth. At last, light breaks through the darkness; and ere the Psalm of the Agony closes, He can tell the joyful experience, imparting help and hope and courage to all His people in their hours of misgiving—"Thou hast heard Me from the horns of the unicorns. . . . They shall praise the Lord that seek Him. Your heart shall live for ever" (Psalm xxii. 21, 26). The pathway of thorns is changed into that of triumph.

Take courage from the example and experience of the Great Sufferer. Plead the promise of this same praying Saviour, whose heart vibrates and throbs on the throne to the woes of humanity:—"Verily, verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in My name He will give it you." Only adding, as He did, "Nevertheless not as I will, but as Thou wilt."

The great lesson He would teach His children is "Be patient." Let faith rise above the obscurations of sight and sense. This was the philosophy of affliction manifested in the case of the smitten patriarch of Uz. "Behold we count them happy which *endure*. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful and of tender mercy" (James v. 11). In the case of this much tried servant, the mysterious dealings came at last to be vindicated;

and in anticipation he sang the song of victory on his bed of ashes—"Though He slay me yet will I trust in Him." "For I know that my Redeemer liveth!"

Seek to imitate this creed of the Pilgrim Father. Chide your buffeted and baffled faith with the verse which heads this meditation, "Why sayest thou, O Jacob, and speakest, O Israel?" "Israel!" that is the tenderest word in the remonstrance, for it again recalls the wrestler in Peniel,—the conflict all night long, which left a struggling wayfarer the triumphant "Soldier of God!" Hope on; trust on; fight on; pray on. Feel the calm assurance that "the prayer of faith shall save," and that, too, despite of thwarted purposes and apparently unanswered requests. I note these words in the current pages of a Magazine. They simply but truthfully describe the sorrowful,—the at times despairing yearnings of one who feels the mystery of unsuccoured pleadings; but who feels also, that these "silences," rightly understood, have deep meanings, if not in most cases triumphant issues,—and alluring, at all events, to higher hopes, even though the way lead through shadow and darkness,—

> "Will not the baffled soul, dismayed,
> Fall prostrate in the dust?
> The expectant child-like heart, afraid,
> Forget its early trust?

"'They shall not be ashamed who wait,'
Are words that cannot fail.
Blessed who linger at the gate
Until their suit prevail.

* * * * *

"Forthwith, transfigured, smiles each sense
O'er which the darkness fell;
The notes of praise swell clear and keen,—
'He doeth all things well.'"

They are an echo of the more familiar words of the Laureate,—

"The world's great Altar-Stairs,
Which slope *through darkness up to God*."

Not a few, doubtless, have personally experienced —more likely have witnessed in others such notable results and triumphs. One aged mother in Israel, well known to the writer, never ceased for years, undeterred by adverse, almost hopeless influences, to plead, and plead, and plead again,—rising from her bed at night, in the darkness, to pursue her importunate suit. She refused to surrender the conviction that the answer would come. Though it tarried, she "waited for it." Come it did, in time to gladden her waning existence and to enable her on her own death-bed—"the sleep of the beloved"—to adore her faithful God as the Hearer and *Answerer* of prayer. Her experience for years might well have been that of our verse, "My way is hid from the Lord, and my judgment

is passed over from my God." But she had "known and heard," and testified,—that "the everlasting God (the God of Eternity), the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary."

Reader, look and long for the assured gleams of this Pillar of Fire. "The Lord is good unto them that wait for Him, to the soul that seeketh Him." He never said unto any of the seed of Jacob, "Seek ye My face in vain." Three times Christ prayed the prayer of His agony before He was heard. Three times St. Paul prayed the prayer for the removal of the buffeting thorn before he was heard. In both cases, at last, succour was given, not in the way it was asked for (by removal), but an angel was sent from heaven to *strengthen.* You may be now like the Apostle on another occasion, in the dungeons of Philippi: your soul under scourging; your feet fast in the stocks:—the plaintive dirge on your lips, "Where is now my God?" But, as with him, "at midnight," the darkest hour of all, deliverance,—not perhaps as you expect it, will be vouchsafed. The gracious though deferred accents will be heard,—"Thou calledst me in troubles, and I delivered thee: and heard thee what time as the storm fell upon thee" (Psalm lxxxi. 7, Prayer Book version). Yes, following the Pillar,—peering for its light in the

surrounding darkness, sooner or later the experience and the prayer of the desert Psalm will be your own : "They cried unto the Lord in their trouble, and He saved them out of their distresses. He brought them out of darkness and the shadow of death, and brake their bands in sunder. Oh, that men would praise the Lord for His goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of men!"

"O HOUSE OF JACOB, COME YE AND LET US WALK IN THE LIGHT OF THE LORD."

TWENTY-FIRST DAY.

THE CHASTISEMENT OF LOVE.

"The Lord went before them by night in a pillar of fire."

"As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten."—REV. iii. 19.

I REBUKE." "I chasten." These are solemn asseverations.

The Fire of the Glory-Pillar we have interpreted very specially, as the symbol of the Divine love But we dare not restrict it to this. It is the emblem of the Divine holiness also. It was an opening strain in the closing song of Israel's great chief,—"A God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is He" (Deut. xxxii. 4). And the same assertion is repeated in various forms throughout Scripture.

Nor is it well, in the midst of these thoughts of comfort and solace, to forget this complementary phase of affliction, that God—yes, God, our Heavenly Father, appears to His pilgrim Israel now, as then, at times in a penal character, with the fire of rebuke and chastisement. "Behold, Mine angel," says He, "shall go before thee: nevertheless, in the day when I visit, I will visit their sin upon them" (Exod. xxxii. 34). True, it is not the loftiest, it is not the consolatory view to take of His dealings. That gracious assurance of "Fatherhood" revolts

at the thought of retributive suffering. In our seasons of deepest grief we cling to the revelation of the Divine Being with His repertory of golden promises, announcing earth's best symbol of love ("like as a Father") to be the parable and exponent of His own. Moreover, it would be doing injustice at once to God and His people,—it would be a misapprehension contradicted by the lips of a gracious Saviour, to regard chastisement in the light the sterner Jews were disposed to do, as the invariable token of Divine displeasure (John ix. 2, 3). But yet I feel convinced many a stricken one, conscious of sin—it may be some special sin—can acknowledge through tears: "I know that Thy judgments are right, and that in faithfulness Thou hast afflicted me." "Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Thy sight, that Thou mightest be justified when Thou speakest, and be clear when Thou judgest." "And David said unto God, I have sinned greatly in that I have done this thing: but now put away, I beseech Thee, the iniquity of Thy servant. . . . And the Lord commanded the Angel, and he put up his sword again into the sheath thereof" (1 Chron. xxi. 8, 27).

Often, too, there may be felt and owned some strange recondite correspondence between the sin and its chastisement, known only to the individual soul, as it whispers its unspoken griefs and accusings

in the ear of Omniscience. The arrow which pierces and rankles may be feathered from our own bosoms. It may be some wilful overt act of transgression. It may be the neglect and omission of some known duty. It may be siren voices of the world to which our traitor hearts have too readily though gradually responded, resulting in a wounding of the conscience, restraining prayer, grieving the Spirit: in a word, *spiritual declension.* He subjects in mercy,—yes, in mercy, to some sharp discipline, to rouse us from our perilous sleep. That is the rebuke and chastisement of love here spoken of. Self-humbled, self-accused, self-condemned, we utter the confession with tremulous lip and broken heart —"Righteous art Thou, O Lord."

Tried and suffering one, be comforted. I believe in this furnace of affliction—the fire of Divine rebuke. But I believe, yet more, in the fire of *purifying* chastisement. Blessed is the man who owns the rectitude of the Great Chastiser, yet who regards all the Divine dealings, with their apparent severity,—wasting disease, blighted affections, withering disappointments, lacerating bereavements, only (strange as may be the contradiction) as the tokens and pledges of a Father's love. The parent of the Parable, weeping over his penitent prodigal, is the Image of God. He tells you it is a furnace of affliction, lighted, it may be, because of your

sin. But He tells you, also, that He kindles it not to destroy but to refine. He Himself is seated by, tempering the fury of the flames; keeping the silver in the glowing heat just so long and no longer than is needed to purify,—to purge away the dross, and leave His own image reflected there,—"a vessel fit for the Master's use." One of the great master comforters of a past generation reminds us "it is where the rough waves roar, and the rattling shingle is tossed about, that we find the pebbles rounded and polished. So the Lord is shaping the storm-tossed life" (*Guthrie*). "In the same way," says another, "Christ deals with the white sapphire stone of His love, glistening with its hexagon star of light and the disciple's own name engraved by His own hand as a keepsake of love. . . . The white stone is love's symbol. For in the old heraldry the sapphire always meant love. The ruby, which is only the red sapphire, earth's love. The commoner blue sapphire, heaven's love. The white sapphire, Christ's special love" (*Lovell*).

Never let us forget God's object in affliction. It is to draw out new and hitherto unmanifested graces, especially the grace of silent unquestioning submission: the "*peaceable* fruits of righteousness in them that are exercised thereby." To adopt a sentence written on a different subject, "The

devout soul, in this process, may be likened to a sensitised plate, set in proper position under a starlit sky, which after due exposure is found marked by new stars, invisible to the naked eye, and beyond the farthest sweep of the unaided telescope" (*Edinburgh Review*). At times the remedial measures, which God sees and knows to be required, may involve the destruction of fond hopes and proud ambitions. You may recall the story of the Italian painter, high on the church scaffolding, completing on that dizzy height one of the frescoes in the cupola. He was over-absorbed in his labour, and in a perilous position, from there being no railing or balustrade. While stepping back, as is the artist's wont, to get the general effect of his subject, he was all unconsciously on the very verge of the scaffolding. Another step would have hurled him a dead man to the marble pavement beneath. A brother artist close by, perceived his danger. With a flash of thought he took the swiftest, best means of rescuing his friend. What was this? He made a dash with his brush at the wet fresco. In so doing he spoilt his companion's work, but he saved his life. This is at times God's needful method of dealing and discipline. He sees His people in perilous and "slippery places," about "to cast themselves to destruction," possibly through their own blind-

ness, and all unconscious of danger. He wrecks, for the moment, their darling hopes, spoils "the pride of life." But all to save and prevent irreparable spiritual loss. "The day of the Lord of Hosts is . . . on all *pleasant pictures*" (Isa. ii. 16). It is a strong expression to employ. I heard that great preacher, Henry Melvill, use it fifty years ago, and I have never forgotten it, as he spoke pathetically of a father laying child after child in the grave. "It broke his heart, but saved his soul!" Yes, emphasize the saying of our motto-verse, "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten." "Unto you it is given—(a family badge, a covenant privilege) to suffer." It is with His own children He thus deals, "Whose fire is in *Zion*, and His furnace in *Jerusalem*" (Isa. xxxi. 9).

O fire of the cloudy Pillar! come and search me, come and try me, come and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting! Great will be the blessedness of sorrows if such be the result.

"AND AFTER THE FIRE A STILL SMALL VOICE."

TWENTY-SECOND DAY.

VARIED RETROSPECTS.

"The Lord went before them by night in a pillar of fire."

"Thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness."—DEUT. viii. 2.

"I will make there an altar unto God, who answered me in the day of my distress, and was with me in the way which I went."—GEN. xxxv. 3.

THERE are times in the pilgrimage for more special and solemn recollection. Outstanding anniversaries, birthdays, death-days, and other memorial occurrences, familiar to all, with their blended lights and shadows,—these perhaps becoming more impressive as the milestones lessen and the shadows lengthen—pensive twilight hours where there is a growing consciousness that the sun is "westering,"—that the day cannot be far off when Jordan is reached; a few more earthly tents at most can be pitched ere crossing its waters. In such and similar crisis-seasons, and specially the last named, while nearing the hour of departure, the past journey is vividly recalled. Perhaps the most conspicuous is the Lord's *discipline*, with its gracious solaces and alleviations:—"I call to remembrance my song in the night." The recognition, too, of a Divine purpose in mysterious dispensations:—"Thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee in the wilderness to *humble thee and to prove thee*." "All the way:" all the leadings, all the teachings. Not the mystery

of this or that isolated trial, but the relation of them to the entire pilgrimage; the retrospect of God's multiform and cumulative dealings, the summation of His procedure towards us as one grand whole. With the sacramental provisions of the desert at an end, looking back from the close, this will be the testimony regarding the Jehovah of the Pillar of Cloud,—"He led them *all the night* with a light of fire." Your life-psalm, and specially its terminating strains, will be in accord with many of Israel's desert songs. Take some verses from one of the greatest of these. We may imagine the words inspiring heart and lip of the triumphant host as they stood on the western slopes of the Moab mountains with the hills of Canaan yet in the distance. Figuratively each believer may make them his own:—

"I will make mention of the deeds of the Lord;
For I will remember Thy wonders of old.
I will meditate also upon all Thy work
And muse on Thy doings.
Thy way, O God, is in the sanctuary;
Who is a great God like unto God?
Thou art the God that doeth wonders.
Thou hast made known Thy strength among the peoples,
Thou hast with Thine arm redeemed Thy people,
The sons of Jacob and Joseph.

* * * * *

Thy way was in the sea
And Thy path in the great waters,

And Thy footsteps were not known.
(But) Thou leddest Thy people like a flock,
By the hand of Moses and Aaron."

PSALM lxxvii. 11 to end, R.V.

Mourner, whatever be your present feelings under the gloom of some starless night of trial, even the light of the Pillar obscured with murky vapour, haze, and cloud,—you will then, at least,

"When scenes long past of joy and pain
Come wildering o'er the aged brain,"

be able to join in the attestation of every spiritual Israelite,—"They shall *abundantly utter* the memory of Thy great goodness, and shall sing of Thy righteousness" (Psalm cxlv. 7). With the patriarch of our second motto-verse you will be led to say, "Let us arise and go up to Bethel; and I will make there an altar unto God, who answered me in the day of my distress, and was with me in the way which I went" (Gen. xxxv. 3). What you deemed at the time, what you may deem now, harsh tones and discords, will be owned in truth to have been the love-whispers of Jesus,—the way He took to accomplish within you His own ideal. He adopts every means to rouse from the earthly nest for a sunward flight. Be assured all will then be recognised as needed ministries. The apparent disharmonies of the past will be merged and forgotten in the sound of the great jubilee trumpet, "The

year of My redeemed is come!" Even the fear of death, when the last enemy lays his icy finger on your own brow, or the brow of those you love—the natural shrinking from "the swellings of Jordan," will be taken away. In accordance with Bunyan's description of one of his pilgrims in the land of Beulah, "There was a great calm at that time in the river. . . . This river has been a terror to many: yea, the thoughts of it have often frightened me: but now methinks I stand easy."

Happy are those who, meanwhile, are able so far to discount the intensity of present sorrow, and to accept the gracious though severe discipline. One of the purest, most loving and lovable of souls, familiar to all who heard her "nightingale warblings," and more familiar recently to those who have read the better warblings of her life (like a delegate from her own "bright seraphim"), thus speaks:—here is her testimony as life advanced, and after a time of severe trial: "It has passed over my soul like a beneficent storm which has broken down all the hard shell of my being, and has set free many green plants to find their way to the dear Sun. . . . I have only one prayer, that in the evening of my life I may be able to show a pure soul to God. . . . The *Summa Summarium* is, that I have won the greatest profit out of both outer and inner misfortune, and can thank God that

I know what trouble is. All makes at last for good. God does not die."

No, "God does not die." "*The Lord liveth.*" It is among the most touching inscriptions in Westminster Abbey, one of the two memorable death-sayings of John Wesley, twice repeated on the eve of his departure, "The best of all is, *God is with us.*" God has been with us,—with us "in the way which we went"; with us now. The wilderness is full of His inarticulate voices,—the voice behind us saying, "This is the way, walk ye in it." He *led* them and *lighted* them—(the DUX, LUX, of our opening page) —not with finite and fallible wisdom, not by arbitrary dealings, but with ineffable love and faithfulness: adapting His leading to the wants and requirements of His people: now the sheltered valley: now the sandy treeless waste: now the gleam of the Pillar: now the earthquake and whirlwind. Comforting thought! Our lives and our paths are not self-appointed but divinely appointed: that, too, in all their windings, on to the termination. "When I came to the gate that is at the head of the way, the Lord of that place gave me such things that were necessary for my journey and bid me hope to the end. . . . My mind is beyond the river that has no bridge" (*Pilgrim's Progress*).

The same God of pilgrims has promised still to give strength equal to the way and to the day.

He is Himself that strength: they are "strong in the Lord and in the power of His might." It is no morbid sentiment that as we advance in life the world gets poorer daily. We can make no new friendships; the bloom of early affection, like that of the finer fruits on garden wall or conservatory, cannot be retained or restored. But He is without variableness or shadow of turning. "He hath said, I will never leave thee nor forsake thee." "He will be our Guide even unto death."

I have called this chapter "Varied Retrospects." Following up the sentences of the immediately previous page (in which "the changes and chances" of our mortal existence are spoken of), a reference, enshrining a "retrospect" of a peculiar kind, has just vividly recalled itself; and seems, by way of illustration, appropriate here. Several years ago in autumn—the eve of harvest—I was present at a musical service in the Cathedral of Lucerne, where the diversified notes of the organ, played by a skilled musician, rolled through the building, interpreting Nature in her diversified moods, from the wild and grand to the soft and beautiful. It was an evident "adaptation" of Beethoven's *Pastoral Symphony*. It began with the birth of the storm, which seemed slowly to brood over the far horizon Now it was heralded by pattering rain-

drops; now it was the sighing of the wind through "the forest primeval"; now it was thunder-tones waking the echoes of the neighbouring Alps, the torrents which the rain had swelled rushing through their gorges. In the vivid words of Lowell, almost as if written for the occasion—

"You can hear the quick heart of the tempest beat.

* * * * *

"The crinkled lightning
Seems ever-brightening,
And loud and long,
Again the thunder shouts
His battle song—
One quivering flash,
One wildering crash,
Followed by silence dead and dull.

* * * * *

"And then a total lull."

Yes, the lull and what followed was the most impressive of all. The revel of these forces, which spoke only too audibly of terror and dismay, ruined harvests and blighted crops, was followed by a soft cadence. At first, it resembled the ripple of brook or twitter of lark. The dulcet sounds waxed sweeter and lovelier. The spirit of the storm was exorcised; and the culmination of all was the Reapers', or the Villagers', "Hymn of thanksgiving," rising like a canticle of angels. These final notes

alone remained; leaving on the ear the peace and calm of heaven. With that the performance ceased. Many a soul knows too well what, in another sense, after the quiet of 'summer in the life'—a blissful calm—is the devastation of autumn storm with its rain, and flood, and hurricane. But "the Lord sitteth on the flood; yea, the Lord sitteth King for ever. . . . The Lord will bless His people with peace" (Psalm xxix. 10, 11). There is a time coming, when the rage and riot of present disturbing mortal elements shall cease: when cataract and cataclysm will be forgotten amid the strains of the great Eucharist hymn on the lips of "the multitude which no man can number." That song of Heaven's "Harvest Home" will be the same which Faith and Hope were wont, amid lowering clouds, to sing on earth—"He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him" (Psalm cxxvi. 6).

As these special recollections of this meditation have been more peculiarly suggestive of Death, let another comforting patriarchal record, older than the Israelites and their desert Pillar, be recalled Regarding more than one of the Pilgrim Fathers it was said, at their hour of departure, "*He gave up the ghost.*" Ghost (Anglo-Saxon *gast*) or *guest* (for so the word is supposed to mean) reminds of the

"Guest chamber," "The House of Rest." It brings before us life, not as a final home, but a succession of halting places in the journey, with their *Hospices* for shelter from the windy storm and tempest,—lodgings for the wayfarer; and death—the opening to "the Resting-place," with its shadows and darkness apparently closing all. The distinguished Master, who presided over the Great School of the North well known to the writer,—as he lay on his dying couch, felt that strange indescribable gloom gathering around him. The thoughts of his long and useful life-work filled his mind's eye—crowding the retrospect. Fancying himself once more in his familiar class room, these were among his last words—"Now, boys, it is getting dark, you may go home." Death is darkness; but it is a "home-going." The superscription over its Gateway is—THROUGH DARK TO LIGHT. Standing underneath the portico-entrance, a shadow is momentarily thrown. Once the door is opened—"The darkness is past, and the true Light shineth." The gleam of the old Wilderness Pillar is rekindled amid eternal realities—

"No cloud upon its radiant joy,
No shadow o'er its bright employ,
No sleep—no night,
Wrong turned to right,
Dim faith exchanged for perfect sight!"

Yes, and the threefold memories of that Eternal *Home*. as we still recall all His wilderness leadings, will be these :—

GOD IS LIGHT, GOD IS LIFE, GOD IS LOVE

TWENTY-THIRD DAY

THE SIGHT OF THE KING, AND THE HEAVENLY SONG.

"The Lord went before them by night in a pillar of fire"

"Thine eyes shall see the King in His beauty: they shall behold the land that is very far off."—Isa. xxxiii. 17.

"And they sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb."—Rev. xv. 3.

"THE land that is very far off." Still the wilderness,—the wilderness, it may be at its saddest and dreariest; "a dry and thirsty land where no water is,"—"A day of darkness and of gloominess, a day of clouds and of thick darkness, as the morning spread upon the mountains" (Joel ii. 2).

It would only be to rehearse previous pages, were I to attempt surmising the special affliction with which it has pleased God to visit you.

It may be those terrible night-watches recently spoken of, when, tossed on a couch of suffering, you prevent the dawning of the morning with the plaint, "Lord, how long?" or with Job's unsuccoured cry, "Show me wherefore Thou contendest with me."

Or, you may be called to stand by the pillow of one dear to you as your life,—to know the heart-anguish,—the *torture*—of being powerless to assuage the bewildering pain, or to smooth the furrows from the brow.

Or, it may more likely be, these seething, restless

waves have been hushed, and Death's great harbour has been entered. The fierce battle has been bravely fought, and the longed-for victory won. Alas! that victory brings with it, to you and to survivors, the sad consciousness of a sacred link snapped: one departed, who by the very patience which protracted suffering evoked, was only the more endeared to you. The lips which had ofttimes spoken, in audible whispers, a homily of endurance, are now closed. The wilderness-tent, pole and curtains and canvas removed,—nothing apparently of the cherished bivouac remaining but a patch of grey ashes,—the place that once knew it, knowing it no more!

Awaking from this and similar dreams to a sense of strange loneliness and isolation, with earth's hopes blighted and its enthusiasms dead, the question at once presses itself with impassioned importunate urgency, "Is that the end of all? Is that God's limited, imperfect outcome for the work of His own hands? a few transient years of suffering and prostration,—then, the loving flame extinguished in the darkness and oblivion of the grave! Can it be that this world is only a portal opening out on annihilation? Has the spirit vanished to the Pagan region of 'no return'? Did that rough casket hide for ever the priceless jewel from our gaze, and are the flowers and

daisies that next summer-tide are to sprinkle the turf, all that the future can give or promise? Is this poor present possession of anguish to have no nobler reversion in some life and scene immortal?"

Yes, with a special, gracious Hand, He leads you here too, through the long night "with a light of fire." The *wilderness* is too sadly, too truly yours; the darkness is a darkness that may be felt. But Faith and Hope are seen returning with Eschol pledges from the Land of Promise: the land that may still be, in one sense, "very far off," but which your season of trial has brought to you very near. There is a Canaan,—a Heaven purchased and secured by indefeasible, inalienable right. "The Lord thy God bringeth thee," says the Jehovah of the Pillar-cloud, "into a good land,—a land that floweth with milk and honey. Thou shalt bless the Lord thy God for the good land which He hath given thee." There is a time coming and a world coming, when sorrows shall be ended, the mystery of pain unfolded, the "need be" explained,—when present inequalities in the human lot shall be redressed and adjusted, and when the avowal often now whispered with tremulous lips shall be uttered unhesitatingly, "Just and true are Thy ways!" Christ, "the Lord and Giver of Life," has not left, either in your own case or in that of those dear to you, heart-yearnings, longings

after immortality, baffled. The *King* has lifted the curtain to disclose the Beautiful Land. It is one of the concluding utterances in His great Valedictory,—the gleam of the lighted Pillar falls on the words,—"Father, I will, that they also whom Thou hast given Me be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory!" On that same occasion He assures His disciples that He would not deceive them with misleading teachings,—that He would not take them to a Mount Pisgah and show them a land "very far off," which they were forbidden to enter (John xiv. 2). His own Risen Life is to be the pledge and guarantee of theirs. Their immortal being is to be commensurate with His,—"Because I live, ye shall live also!"

Our second motto-verse admits us into the very presence of "the King in His beauty." It presents to us the twofold Theme in the song of the glorified.

Note, how the heavenly anthem is attuned to the memories of the desert, "They sing the song of MOSES the servant of God, and the song of the LAMB." In other words,—the song of *Providence* and the song of *Grace*. And if it be bereavement that is your present affliction, you can think of your loved one singing that dual strain!

(1) *The Song of the cloudy and fiery Pillar; the Song of God's providential dealings in the bygone*

wilderness. If these dealings be a retrospect of suffering and pain and death, the joy of exemption from these in a sorrowless world, will only be enhanced by the contrast with the earthly experience, "These are they that *came out of great tribulation*" (Rev. vii. 14). Once they hungered, and thirsted, and fainted, and groaned, and were burdened. Now, "they shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more." Angels who have never suffered and never died, cannot know the bliss of contrast. It is a privilege belonging alone to the ransomed. Those who have buffeted the windy storm and tempest can alone understand the shelter and safety of the Eternal Home. They will love to retrace every turn and winding of the oft chequered pilgrimage; not now with the host of Egypt behind and the dread wilderness before; but encamped by a sea of glass, mirroring the peace of God. They will "sing the song of *Moses*," and the burden of that song of Providence will be the now familiar earthly words with a heavenly meaning,—"He led them forth also by a right way, that they might go to a city of habitation. . . . Oh, that men would praise the Lord for His goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of men!"

(2) *The Song of Grace*,—the song of Redemption; the song whose keynote will be the wilderness memory of the Paschal Lamb, with the besprinkled

lintels and door-posts : " Worthy is the Lamb that was slain ! " It will gather its chief inspiration from the beatific Presence,—the sight of " the King." And conjoined with this vision, there will be fellowship with His saints ; they, glad and rejoicing in Him ; He, glad and rejoicing in them. Our own beloved dead, ransomed from the power of the grave, will be among the number. " All Thine are Mine, and Mine are Thine, and I am glorified in them " (John xvii. 10). One of the bridal songs of the Church militant shall then receive a new significance at these espousals of the Church triumphant, —" The King's daughter is all glorious within ; her clothing is of wrought gold. She shall be brought unto the King in raiment of needlework, the virgins, her companions that follow her, shall be brought unto Thee. With gladness and rejoicing shall they be brought, they shall enter into the King's palace " (Psalm xlv. 13, 14, 15). Think of this gathering,— this " federation of souls " under their living Head beyond the river ! Each redeemed one will be as " a Pillar of fire " : " Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the Kingdom of their Father : " the glory broadening and deepening into eternal day.

Reader, seek to realise the presence of that King in His beauty *now*. Remember, in the midst of human sorrow and suffering, frailty and weakness,

that "All power is given to Him"—that Omnipotence slumbers in His arm. "He *is* King." Yea, "King of kings, and Lord of lords" (Rev. xix. 16):—the mighty God, while the sympathetic Elder Brother. One of the most glorious revelations given to St. John in Patmos was this very Deity of His, in conjunction with the symbol of suffering humanity of which we have been speaking. "I beheld," says he, "and, lo, in the midst of the throne stood a Lamb as it had been slain" (Rev. v. 6). The comment of an old Writer is, "a Lamb," not in *front* of the throne, nor at the *side* of the throne, nor at the *back* of the throne,—but "*in the midst of the throne*";—emblem of His supreme Divinity,—Godhead in conjunction with the tenderness of humanity: the true "mighty Angel" of another chapter, rainbow-crowned, and (carrying out the name and symbol of the present volume) "clothed with a cloud . . . and His feet as *Pillars of fire*" (Rev. x. 1). The ever-present consciousness of His nearness, love, and exalted sympathy proves the best antidote and panacea in times of sore trouble. John,—the beloved disciple, the likest to his Lord, delights in after years (his lonely years, his suffering years), to gaze on that Fiery Pillar. In the memory of its gleam he writes,—"We *beheld His glory*, the glory as of the Only Begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth" (John i. 14). Its gracious

radiance remained with him still, whether at Jerusalem or Bethsaida,—Patmos or Ephesus. In a rapture of ecstatic joy,—the Presence and the Land alike now not far off, but rather getting nearer and nearer,—he exclaims, "It doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that when He shall appear, we" (and that "*we*" including all whom we have "loved long since and lost awhile") "we shall be like Him, for *we shall see Him as He is*!"

"AND SO SHALL WE EVER BE WITH THE LORD."

TWENTY-FOURTH DAY.

MORE ENDURING THAN MOUNTAINS.

"The Lord went before them by night in a pillar of fire."

"The mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but My kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of My peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy upon thee."—Isa. liv. 10.

"Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness, leaning upon her Beloved?"—Sol. Song viii. 5.

MOUNTAINS are God's sentinels in outer creation. Mountains have ever been the symbols of immutability in the Kingdom of Grace.

As the Pillar of Flame moved on in its majestic leading, the rocks of the Sinai region must specially have been lighted up in lurid splendour: the glow on cliff and precipice would be all the more impressive to pilgrim Israel, so long habituated to the level plains and sands of Egypt. Jehovah made the chief of these mountains His throne. The words of the Decalogue were sounded, as from a tribunal, on its loftiest peaks: and the *Mountain*-memories of "the great and terrible wilderness" seem to have survived all others. Thus does the prophet sing of that desert-march: "God came from Teman, and the Holy One from Mount Paran. . . . The eternal mountains were scattered, the everlasting hills did bow" (Hab. iii. 3, 6). "Even Sinai itself," says the minstrel king, "was moved at the presence of God, the God of Israel" (Psalm lxviii. 8).

In the words of the first of our verses we have another chief singer in the great choir, making the mountains with their firm foundations,—mono-

liths of primeval granite,—to be preachers of comfort. You can sooner expect these mountains to drift from their moorings, than God's kindness to depart from you and the covenant of His peace to be removed. "Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look upon the earth beneath: for the heavens shall vanish away like smoke, and the earth shall wax old like a garment, and they that dwell therein shall die in like manner: but My salvation shall be for ever, and My righteousness shall not be abolished" (Isa. li. 6).

Afflicted one, are you mourning the loss of wealth, the loss of friends, the premature setting of bright earthly suns, "the graves of a household"? What you dreamt of as permanent, enduring buttresses—buttresses of iron, reveal, in an unexpected moment, first a rent, and then they come with a crash to the ground. Too sadly, too truly the earthly props and pillars may be gone. But that which forms the figure throughout this volume, not human but Divine, survives the wreck of all. The voices of earth come and go,—the voice of God remains. Angels, as they cluster around the sick-bed and death-bed, or watch the survivor stooping in tears at the grave, whisper to one another, "He spake unto them in the Cloudy Pillar" (Psalm xcix. 7).

This parable of the mountains seems to me

peculiarly beautiful and impressive. Let us for a moment linger on it, and change the scene of the picture from east to west,—equally glorious mountain-regions nearer ourselves. Gaze up at those barrier Alps with their coronals of eternal snow, like a conclave of kings seated on thrones of alabaster. Coeval with creation, they appear fresh as at first sculptured by the Great Artificer, claiming a pedigree older than the pyramids. Yet, not only they *may* change, but, though it be imperceptibly, they *are* changing. Through atmospheric and other influences corrosion is doing its slow and silent work. Frost and tempest with giant chisel are incising and furrowing their brows. Their sides are ploughed with the avalanche, strewing the valley with uprooted pine forests, or with fragments of rock whose golden lichen "has reflected the sunsets of a thousand years." The ocean boasts of an unwrinkled surface. But these Titan—apparently adamantine heights cannot hurl back the challenge.

> "The hills are shadowed, and they flow
> From form to form, and nothing stands:
> They melt like mist, the solid lands,
> Like clouds they shape themselves and go."
>
> *Tennyson.*

The voice of the tempest rioting around their summits, takes up the hymn of the peasants in the

châlets below, "Change is our portion here!" But He, who is mightier than tempests,—who maketh the clouds His chariot, who walketh on the wings of the wind, and "discovereth the forests," says of and to His people, "I change not." No forces, material or spiritual, can undermine your covenant security. "As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the Lord is round about His people from henceforth even for ever" (Psalm cxxv. 2). I have graven thy name, not in friable pulverising rock, or tottering monument, but "on the palms of My hand." It is indelible. (Isa. xlix. 16.)

And thus, to the cynical, pessimistic question of these latter days, "Is Life worth living?" the answer may be given,—that too, even with a roll and record of accumulated affliction,—"Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: *yet* I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation" (Hab. iii. 17, 18).

I may appropriately close this meditation with a reference to that other desert picture, designed for every pilgrim of sorrow, suggested in our second quotation. It is that of a straggler from the caravan, faint and weary, desolate and forlorn,—

a wanderer from "the Shepherd's tents," and "the footsteps of the flock" (Sol. Song i. 8). The daylight is about to fade, the rush of darkness is at hand; but the great Sympathetic One has hastened to the succour. A group of spectators, as they see the two figures afar off revealed in the first flash of the lighted pillar, are heard exclaiming, "Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness, leaning upon her Beloved?"

"What dejected form is this
Coming from the wilderness?
Feeble step and languid eye,
Tell a chequer'd history.
'Weary one, art thou alone,
With no arm to lean upon?'

"Everlasting arms of love
Are beneath, around, above;
He who faced the fiery flood,
Braved the baptism of blood;
Who upon th' accursed tree
Gave His precious life for me;
He who marks each falling tear
Of His burden'd pilgrims here;
He who wields Creation's rod,
He, my Brother, yet my God,
Never slumb'ring, never sleeping,
Vigils ever wakeful keeping,—
He it is that bears me on,
His the arm I lean upon.

"All things hasten to decay,
Earth and seas must pass away;

Soon must yonder circling sun
Cease his blazing course to run.
Scenes may vary, friends grow strange,
But *The Changeless* cannot change.
Fellowship that nought can sever,
Loving once, He loves for ever!
Say, with such a Friend as this,
Who would dread the wilderness?"

O thou who art mourning at this moment over the perishable, look to the Imperishable! Fast may be falling "the eventide," with the poet's "deepening darkness." You may have, in the midst of sudden affliction, that strange sense of insecurity even about remaining blessings which the bereaved know so well. The intermittent fire-glow is seen in the Pillar; but you have a half-trembling dread of its extinction,—leaving you lonely and despairing in the starless night! No, no! With this consciousness of instability blend a prayer to the Immutable,—

"Swift to its close ebbs out life's little day,
Earth's joys grow dim, its glories pass away;
Change and decay in all around I see,
O Thou, who changest not, abide with me!"

"THE SUN SHALL BE NO MORE THY LIGHT BY DAY; NEITHER FOR BRIGHTNESS SHALL THE MOON GIVE LIGHT UNTO THEE; BUT THE LORD SHALL BE UNTO THEE AN EVERLASTING LIGHT, AND THY GOD THY GLORY."

TWENTY-FIFTH DAY.

THE BROKEN HEART HEALED.

"The Lord went before them by night in a pillar of fire."

"A wounded spirit who can bear?"—PROV. xviii. 14.

"He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds."—PSALM cxlvii. 3.

DOES the Pillar of Fire cast any light on a peculiar experience in the varying night of sorrow? Not bodily suffering or bereavement or death; but the pang caused by unmerited wrong, —all the more poignant if conjoined with ingratitude—the desertion or treachery of trusted friends? —in the words of the psalmist, "My heart is *wounded* within me" (Psalm cix. 22).

If I venture to record a personal remembrance, I do so in order both to add a new flash from the comforting Column, as well as to offer a singular corroboration to more than one of the preceding meditations. The mere personal element in the reference must for once be forgiven.

It matters nothing to the reader what was the occasion of such "unspoken grief." Enough to say that it was one acute in its nature; and though emanating from an unknown source, the words of the wise man at once asserted a meaning all their own—"A wounded spirit who can bear?"

As if in aggravation "the bolt from the blue" reached me on a Sunday morning in London. In

the unsympathetic solitude of the great city, I made it my prayer that in the sanctuary where I proposed worshipping that forenoon, God's servant —(one in many ways peculiarly gifted) might be directed to speak some words of comfort and healing,—something that might tend to alleviate; and make the sharp cross, which it truly was, capable of being submissively borne.

Never can I forget when the text of the sermon was announced,—

"HE HEALETH THE BROKEN IN HEART, AND BINDETH UP THEIR WOUNDS."

It seemed in a moment, as if the bow, drawn by the preacher at a venture, had its feathered and commissioned arrow of consolation. "I have a message from God unto *thee*."

An early, soothing illustration was taken from the Book of Nature, and it was all the more remarkable and impressive, as it was borrowed from a scene in my own native land with which I was very familiar, and which has all my life exercised an enchantment over me. It touched a familiar and responsive chord, "First that which is natural, afterward that which is spiritual" (1 Cor. xv. 46).

With the speaker I was, and am, personally unacquainted; but he will condone the liberty I take, for the sake of the comfort given to myself and doubtless to others in his crowded congregation, if

I try to recall, as near as I may, though it may be in an amplified form, his parable picture: adding, moreover, that though introduced, owing to circumstances, by one suggested form, it is equally applicable to all forms of trial: from those of the sick-chamber, to the death-bed and the grave. Strange enough, however, the spokesman seemed most in sympathy, as will be seen, at the moment, with the special experience above alluded to.

"Several years ago," said he, "I was walking, one autumn afternoon, through that lovely Scottish glen, the Pass of Killiecrankie. To my sorrow, its charms at the time seemed irretrievably spoiled by the formation of a railway. Many of its graceful trees had already fallen. The engineers were blasting its rocks, gashes were being made in the wilderness of wild bracken; the bare, naked piers of a viaduct were half erected. Trails of ivy had been torn from their holdings. Formal embankments were being raised, and artificial bridges were in the course of being built, which appeared fatally to mar all natural grace. There was nothing but havoc on every side. The glory had departed.

"This last autumn," he continued, "I happened, in my holiday, again to visit the same part of the country, including this, what I had thought hopelessly desecrated ground. To my astonish-

ment the old vanished beauty was singularly restored. The gaps, so disfiguring a few years' previously, were refilled. The banks were already clothed with broom and gorse, and the white-stemmed birches were afresh waving their green or golden tresses. The rocks which had been scarred, were tapestried with lichen, the grassy slopes and knolls, so denuded and bare, were again dotted with clumps of native heather and groupings of fern. The very bridges spanning the hollows, which seemed on the former occasion the most glaring offenders, were festooned with ivy. It was altogether a unique and unexpected vision—a resurrection of loveliness. The scene indeed had been altered. The former charm of seclusion had specially been sacrificed. But Nature had wonderfully reasserted her power of restoration. The God of Nature, through this illuminated page, illustrated and interpreted my text—'*He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds.*'

"Yes," he proceeded, "and it is so in a far better, truer, nobler sense, in the world of sorrow. Picture of the heart torn and bleeding. Some cruel unkindness that has lacerated it. The gash of envy or malice that has laid bare an inner wound. Some secret trial which the world knows nothing of, which has shorn it of its joy and comfort and peace, and left it, like that Valley, a wreck of

what it was. Sadder still, when bereavement has stripped it of its glories—the axes of affliction hewing down tender and sacred memorials: affection, more clinging than that ivy, torn rudely from its hold—left apparently to pine and wither on the ground, and appeal in vain for replacement in the old fastenings. On these very occasions of hopelessness and despair, God's ministries of solace are at work. The healing hand of Time has passed into a proverb. Like that favoured spot I have sought to describe, the seams and gashes of the smitten soul will in due season be restored. The angels of resignation and consolation are commissioned to weave a garment for 'the spirit of heaviness' and to 'give beauty for ashes.' Unkindnesses and cutting taunts and cruel reproaches, which we think at first we never can get over, making our lives for the future desolate,—yes" (I well remember as this sentence was uttered, his striking his breast with emphasis), "BREAKING THE HEART. Lo! in a little while, sooner than we could have imagined, new thoughts and new joys, like flocks of birds, make their nests in the caves of the soul. Soon the old desolation is clothed and verdant again, and the leafy coverts are filled with song. 'Although thou sayest thou canst not see Him, yet judgment is before Him, therefore trust thou in Him.' There will be the green

pastures once more. The valleys of life will again invite summer tint, and music of stream, and gush of sunshine. God's own words will have their figurative fulfilment, 'For ye shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace: the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. Instead of the thorn, shall come up the fir tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree: and it shall be to the Lord for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.' '*He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds!*'"

Though I retain a few jottings I can by no means vouch for these being a verbal transcript of the words heard that Sunday morning; for long years have since intervened, and I may have possibly spoiled by the attempt at expansion and embellishment from my own memories of the locality. But should they accidentally meet the eye of the speaker, he will recognise a faithful rehearsal of the spirit, at least, of his remarks, and be glad of the comfort they conveyed. "When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me, *until I went into the sanctuary* of God" (Psalm lxxiii. 16, 17). There the Divine promise was fulfilled, "He satisfieth the longing soul, and filleth the hungry

soul with goodness" (Psalm cvii. 9). "As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you; *and ye shall be comforted in Jerusalem*" (Isa. lxvi. 13).

O reader, trust thy God! He will, gradually, it may be,—but surely,—put forth His healing touch; bringing order out of chaos, calm out of storm, hope out of dejection and despair. Listen to one of the many voices from the Cloudy Pillar. The words seem inspired by that same great drama of the old desert. To the crushed and desolate heart they have often come like a Divine missive borne on the wings of ministering angels:—"I, even I, am He that comforteth you. Who art thou, that thou art afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man that shall be made as grass; and hast forgotten the Lord thy Maker that stretchest forth the heavens and laid the foundations of the earth; and hast feared continually every day because of the fury of the oppressor? . . . But I am the Lord thy God that divided the sea, whose waves roared: the Lord of Hosts is His name. And I have put My words in thy mouth, and I have covered thee in the shadow of My hand, that I may . . . say unto Zion, Thou art My people" (Isa. li. 12, 13, 15, 16). God's treatment of many a sufferer is that of the nurse in the hospital during the long day and the weary night-watches. It is described in our motto-verse by the two

words, "healing" and "binding." He enjoins on His patient, rest and silence.

Specially look to Him who was symbolised by the Fiery Pillar—the Saviour God, who Himself, under the load of bitterest and most varied reproach, was *silent* with submission—"dumb before His shearers," "answering not a word." He "endured grief, suffering wrongfully" (1 Peter ii. 19). He—yes He, draws nigh to you in your hour of wounding and weakness and weariness. The doleful words may be sounding in your ears, "Cease ye from man whose breath is in his nostrils." But He has a gracious, glorious counterpart—"Trust in the Lord for ever, for in the Lord Jehovah is a Rock of Ages!" (R.V.) "HE hath said, 'I will never leave thee nor forsake thee.' So that we may boldly say, 'The Lord is my helper, I will not fear what man can do unto me.'" Let the Pillar thus flash a new healing beam :—

"COMMIT THY WAY UNTO THE LORD, TRUST ALSO IN HIM, AND HE SHALL BRING IT TO PASS. AND HE SHALL BRING FORTH THY RIGHTEOUSNESS AS THE LIGHT, AND THY JUDGMENT AS THE NOONDAY."

TWENTY-SIXTH DAY.

HEAVEN.

"The Lord went before them by night in a pillar of fire."

"God Himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away."—REV. xxi. 3, 4.

THOUGH these words take us beyond Jordan, to the true Land of Promise, they yet form in reality a present ground of comfort, and that the loftiest. The night of the pilgrim way is gladdened by this bright anticipation of "the world to come," with its cluster of negative and positive blessings. The *negative*, absolute cessation from all evil. No more death, no more sorrow, no more crying, no more pain. The *positive*,—the Everlasting Presence and fellowship of Him of whom the night-column of the desert was a type:—"God Himself shall be with them, and be their God."

Sorrowing one, travelling onwards night-watch after night-watch,—the ground you tread saturated with "dewy tears,"—keep your eye fixed on these letters of flame, God's own hieroglyphics inscribed on the glory-symbol, telling you that there is a day coming when affliction and pain and death will have nothing left behind them but a memory. Yes, a memory; waking from a troubled dream:—no more. Angel watchers greeting you with the welcome assurance,—'The Wilderness is all

trodden now. The gloom has vanished; peril is ended; the true light shineth; the former things are passed away.'

Your present trial or trials may doubtless be great. For days and weeks, possibly for years, you may have been seeking in vain to penetrate the environing darkness. The problem, whether connected with yourself or others, may continue unsolved and insoluble. But, in that everlasting dwelling-place, your Heavenly Father will not only be with you, but the description of His own Hand wiping away every lingering tear-drop, seems to indicate a full and perfect unfolding *then*, and by *Himself*, of what is denied you now. "Then is finished *the mystery of God*, according to the good tidings which He declared to His servants" (Rev. x. 7, R.V.). The seals of the roll of Providence will be broken. The confession will be made, no longer with reserve or stammering tongue—

> "And aye the dews of sorrow
> Were lustred with His love!"

Specially will this be true regarding your beloved dead, and the mystery of their departure. You will meet them on the heavenly shore. There is "crying" here spoken of in our motto-verse; suggestive of the Rachels on earth, weeping for their children and will not be comforted because they are not;

husbands, wives, parents, brothers, sisters, mourning their "loved and lost." Then, and there, it will be glad reunions with the loved never to be lost again. You can think of that *now.* You and they can meet in spiritual but very real fellowship even here. In one sense, like the distant stars of the psalmist's night-song, they may have "no speech nor language, their voice is not heard." But faith can catch up the responsive tones floating from the spirit-land,—

"Oh! the outward hath gone! But in glory and power
The spirit surviveth the things of an hour;
Unchanged, undecaying, its Pentecost flame
On the heart's secret altar is beaming the same."

"God washes the eyes by tears," says a powerful writer, "until they can behold the invisible land where tears shall come no more. O love! O affliction! Ye are the guides which show us the way through the great airy space where our loved ones walked; and as hounds easily follow the scent before the dew be risen, so God teaches us, while yet our sorrow is wet, to follow on and find our dear ones in Heaven."

I have heard of this legend concerning a town on the coast of Spain. Two bells had been cast for the tower of its ancient church, intended to be hung there side by side; but the vessel in which they were being brought was wrecked in a storm, and one of the two was hopelessly sunk in the sea.

The myth which superstition had weaved round the story was—that whenever the one sounded on land, the lost one was heard far away chiming at the same time from its ocean belfry. The Iberian legend has its beauty and significance regarding "the Better Country." Severed as we are from our departed, we are still in sympathetic touch. "The bells of earth are bells of heaven." The sweet tones above—the living chimes, are answered from the swell of waves and surge of storm below; an interchange of pledges, that the union of soul with soul remains. Even now, in the words of our great poet, they "are bells of one accord." The hour is coming when "the sea shall give up its dead," and the now severed ones will sing their cadences together in the Church of the First-born. The writer may crave indulgence to insert here, lines he has elsewhere written:—

"We have gained our Home at last,
In this Palace bright and glorious:
Every wave of Jordan past,
Over every foe victorious.
Now across the border river,
From His presence nought can sever,
We shall sing His praise for ever.

"Now we read God's ways aright:
All that evil once portended,
In the blaze of Heavenly light,
Is with love and mercy blended.

Seen across the border river,
From His presence nought can sever,
We shall sing His praise for ever!

"Here beloved friends we meet;
There restored their smiles of gladness,
Everlasting bliss complete;
Joy unmixed with aught of sadness.
Fought the fight—the kingdom won,
Death behind us, life before us,
While eternal ages run,
Never shall we cease the chorus—
'We are safe beyond the river,
From His presence nought can sever
We shall sing His praise for ever!'"

And let us, just in closing, emphasise the thought of this meditation—the thought of this volume—that *affliction* is the main "factor" in all that resultant bliss. What would those heavenly "Biographies" have been, but for God's four blessed Evangelists here spoken of who wrote them—SORROW, CRYING, PAIN, DEATH? Of whom are the most crowded ranks among the Redeemed composed? In the beautiful Vision of Patmos, let "one of the Elders"—pointing to those who "came out of great tribulation," reply—"THESE *are they*" (Rev. vii. 13, 14). Christ's words to His tried and true soldiers on earth, those who are the subjects of severest martial discipline, and who accept it because it is His,—ready to follow Him through

struggle to victory with brave, submissive hearts, will have the promise accompanying gloriously fulfilled in the sorrowless, tearless world—"Him that overcometh will I make a *Pillar* in the temple of My God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of My God, and the name of the city of My God, which is New Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from My God: and I will write upon him My new name" (Rev. iii. 12).

"I HAVE REMEMBERED THY NAME,
O LORD, IN THE NIGHT."

TWENTY-SEVENTH DAY.

LIGHT IN DARKNESS.

"The Lord went before them by night in a pillar of fire."

"And I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known: I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These things will I do unto them, and not forsake them."—Isa. xlii. 16.

"What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter."—John xiii. 7.

A TWIN voice speaking from the Glory-Cloud. That Cloud, as of old, often conducts, as we have again and again noted, not by the short and easy way to the true Canaan, but through formidable leagues of desert. The cry of the fainting Hebrew host is repeated still: "We are entangled; the wilderness hath shut us in." So great too, now and then, is the gloom, that with misgiving hearts we ask—Can the testimony in our case, be indeed true—"He led them ALL *the night* with a light of fire"? "O rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him." The luminous token, temporarily obscured, will in due time appear. He will subject you to no unnecessary peril, no needless circuitous road. Trust this promise; trust it in the dark; trust it when you fail to trace:—"I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known: I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These things will I do unto them, and not forsake them."

What a wondrous succession of wilderness watch-

words! all crowned by the gracious assurance that HE "appoints all"; and that though the light of the Pillar-cloud may seem to us fitful and wavering, He does not, and will not, abandon His covenant Israel. It was but the other day I saw a picture of a blind man. The name—the impressive title—given to it by the artist, was "*Lighten our darkness, O Lord!*" The subject of the picture was reading from the raised letters of a Bible. A lamp was throwing its brightness on the reader's countenance, and on the hieroglyphics of the sacred page. God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, was then and there shining into his heart with the light of the knowledge of His own glory. The principal figure seemed from the reflected glow on the face to say, "And HE took the blind man by the hand and led him" (Mark viii. 23). Here surely Art suggestively portrayed what the Lord does with our rayless souls in the gloom of blinding trial:—"If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me" (Psalm cxxxix. 11).

I love the thought:—*God the Leader of the blind;* and in their very blindness interpreting His ways!

Turn we now to the added motto-verse. We have spoken of it specifically in a previous page. But we may recur to it here as a New Testament

parallel with the Old. "*What I do!*" The Divine Brother in our nature, about to expiate the sins of the world by laying down His own life, uttered the saying. The time He uttered it was that, when surely, beyond all others, an electric chord of sympathy was linking Him with universal suffering humanity. He could then and there, with a deeper intensity and pathos, use the declaration He made of old in the night of the Exodus,—"I know your sorrows." The same balm-word was whispered in this the most solemn crisis of all time. It came from the lips of *dying love.* 'I am about,' He seems to say, 'to encounter the hour and power of darkness for *you.* Will you not accept My own self-surrender and sacrifice, My tears and groans and agony, as the pledge that I can enter, from personal experience, into your uttermost griefs? I can send no redundant trial. Trust My "hereafter promise." And, meanwhile, let the reverential saying be your own,—the saying I am about to utter in the garden-shade, in the name of all sufferers,—"This cup which My heavenly Father giveth Me to drink, shall I not drink it?"'

Yes, "hereafter." "I will make" (not "I have made") "crooked things straight." "Hereafter"—Reader, let that word ring its solitary chime in your darkness. We cannot too often recall, how emphatically the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews

loves to echo the same—"*Nevertheless* AFTERWARD" (Heb. xii. 11). It is the Divine order and sequence. Present ignorance, future unfoldings. Present darkness, future illumination. Present blindness, the full vision of God; His "light of fire" transforming the arid wastes and sands of the wilderness into a pathway of safety and peace. Even in this world, when, as just noted, the atmosphere is dulled with haze and mist and cloud, we have flashing gleams from the Pillar,—revelations, partial and incomplete it may be, of the ways of the Almighty, strange minglings of light and shadow. In the unblighted home above, there will be a finished retrospect of wisdom and faithfulness, the light of fire without the murky cloud,—the pathetic appeal of the patriarch sufferer heard no more—"When shall I arise and the night be gone?" (Job vii. 4).

Recognise, then, sorrowing one, God's hand and presence in this and all the solemn passages of your life; the day-cloud given to temper the heat of prosperity, the fire-cloud to counteract the noxious exhalations of adversity. "When I am weary and disappointed," says a sympathetic writer, "when the skies lower into the sombre night, when there is no song of bird, and the perfume of flowers is but their dying breath; when all is unsetting and autumn; then I yearn for Him who sits with the summer of love in His soul, and feel that earthly

affection is but a glow-worm light, compared to that which blazes with such effulgence in the heart of God." Other lights may be obscured or missing; yours may possibly even now be either the mourner's watch, with its hushed vigils, or you may be sundered by death from dearly loved ones, yearning for "the touch of the vanished hand." You cannot be away from the touch of God. "The Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest." Grow not weary of His correction. He loves thee through thine anguish, and will yet assuredly vindicate the rectitude of all His procedure.

The lines seem so appropriate, in closing this meditation, that their familiarity will not deter transcribing them. They form the prayer and solace of all "Pilgrims of the night," as they look upwards to their Guiding Pillar:—

"Lead, kindly Light, amid the encircling gloom,
Lead Thou me on!
The night is dark, and I am far from home,
Lead Thou me on!
Keep Thou my feet: I do not ask to see
The distant scene—one step enough for me.

* * * * *

"So long Thy power hath blest me, sure it still
Will lead me on
O'er moor and fen, o'er crag and torrent, till
The night is gone.
And with the morn those angel faces smile
Which I have loved long since, and lost awhile."

Ceasing unavailing tears, look forward to the time when the promise of earth will be perpetuated without symbol in the heavenly city: and when a new meaning will be given to the old words of the Wilderness Leader,—

"BUT ALL THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL HAD LIGHT IN THEIR DWELLINGS."

TWENTY-EIGHTH DAY.

MINGLED DEALINGS.

"The Lord went before them by night in a pillar of fire."

"I will sing of mercy and judgment."—PSALM ci. 1.

ANOTHER gleam of the Pillar,—the gracious blending of God's dealings, as well as the gracious alleviations vouchsafed in the season of trial. "*Mercy and Judgment*" is the believer's dual experience. The writer who penned our motto-verse, himself no stranger to sorrow, puts Mercy first. Our mercies are ever greater than our judgments.

Such, too, was the experience and retrospect of pilgrim Israel in the desert, and of the Hebrew nation in subsequent times. The barren rocks of Meribah, the bitter wells of Marah, the tents of Kedar, the Valley of Baca, alternated with palms of Elim, fields of Manna, vineyards of Eschol, Hill Mizars, "Fountains of gardens, wells of living waters, and streams from Lebanon." Moses, in bringing their own mingled memories vividly before the people, took special care in his address to give prominence to the present, as well as the past proofs and tokens of the Divine goodness:—"The Lord thy God which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage; who

led thee through the wilderness, wherein were fiery serpents and scorpions, and thirsty ground where was no water; who brought thee forth water out of the rock of flint: who fed thee in the wilderness with manna" (Deut. viii. 14, 15, 16, R.V.). Mourner, as you are now passing under the cloud of some mysterious trial, are you not tempted to think of the "Judgment"—the afflictions alone? No one would under-estimate or make light of these. It may be not only loving companionships ended, but garnered intellectual stores thrown apparently "like rubbish to the void"; perhaps wounds deeper still, where there has been moral shipwreck, the truth acutely felt of the familiar words of an old writer, "Better David's dead child than his living Absalom." Be it so. But is it right, is it just, that you should overlook complementary and remaining blessings, and live insensible to the solaces which surround your altered lot, as if all that makes life tolerable or endurable had perished? "Through *cloud* and *sunshine*" is the poet's picture—his *truthful* picture in his great hymn. There are ever blue vistas—rents in the lowering sky: subjects of gratitude amid experiences of deepest grief. A voyager in one of his journals vividly describes, in crossing the Atlantic, the huge icebergs which floated by the vessel. "Nothing could exceed the majesty and beauty of these

masses coming from some mysterious source and floating silently on the mighty ocean. . . . The mass was of the purest alabaster, white as you can conceive, gleaming and glistening in the setting sun." The golden rays glorify the front of the colossal diamond with facets of fire. The reverse —the obverse side, untouched by "the western waves of ebbing day," is dull, opaque, sunless: a deep shadow trails behind. It is a parable of human experience: the contrast, or rather the combination of opposites.

Were you ever struck with that passing incident in the scene at Bethany,—how at the very time Jesus was baptising the grave of His friend with tears, "*He gave thanks*"? (John xi. 41.) "The goodness and severity of God" is St. Paul's statement of the Divine method and procedure (Rom. xi. 22). Take the case of *bereavement*, (we shall speak of it exclusively in the remainder of this Chapter)—the severance which death causes from those (to use a common phrase) you felt in your heart of hearts "you never could do without." Now they are gone. Their departure is like the expunging from the firmament of the lights of heaven. You can understand what is recorded of one of the early English monarchs on the loss of his son, "that from that hour he never smiled again." But every such sorrow—sorrows the most exceptional, with an

anguish all their own—have often—have generally, corresponding intensity of solace and comfort. Specially is it so in the case of dear ones who in life carried with them sunshine wherever they went—loving to God and man. These in the best sense never can be lost. These cannot die. They remain beacon-lights set on the farther shore: such treasures of memory are imperishable. They have left behind them "Songs without words," which reverberate in endless echoes among the hills. The serenade of goodness is everlasting. Finely has one of God's hero-hearts written:—

"What though we are but weary pilgrims here,
Travellers whose place of rest is not below;
Who must along the path of sorrow go:
With weak hearts trembling betwixt hope and fear
For those we cherish and regard so dear:
Yet, mourning brother, wherefore should we know
That rayless grief which broodeth o'er despair?
For still a treasure full of bliss is ours!—
Sweet commune with the good which are and were,
Virtue and love, high truth, exalted powers,
Converse with God in deep, confiding prayer,
An ever present Lord to seek and save,
The word which quickens more than vernal showers,
A Father's House, beyond the silent grave."

Norman Macleod.

To descend for a moment from these higher thoughts. Even in minor things—what may be called the circumstantials of trial, how much have

we often to be thankful for—much that might have been different. In brief commonplace, "things might have been worse." 'My departed,' says one, 'might have dragged out—as many have—a lingering death among strangers.' Another, 'Mine might have fallen hapless in the field of battle, stretching out unsuccoured hands for help and pity.' Another, 'I might only have been permitted to think in connection with him, of ocean's wandering graves, where no epitaph can be traced, his memorial perished with him! But by God's gracious overruling providence, the eyes were closed amid the calm, peaceful surroundings of home,—with tender hands soothing the last hours of suffering, and cherished voices linking thought alike with the seen and the unseen.'

Archbishop Trench in a few terse lines thus sketches a contrast between two opposite frames of mind :—

> "Some murmur when their sky is clear
> And wholly bright to view,
> If one small speck of dark appear
> In their great heaven of blue;
> And some with thankful love are filled
> If but one streak of light,
> One ray of God's good mercy, gild
> The darkness of the night."

May we be of the latter class. Let us lift our drooping heads and think of our merciful palliations,

as well as of innumerable surviving blessings, sunny patches of light gleaming in the shrouded valleys. Truly, says Mrs. Barrett Browning—

"The blue of heaven is larger than the cloud."

Few are unable to tell thus of sweet drops in the cup of sorrow. To name but one, though a frequent experience, the advent of the sympathetic friend who comes as the angel did to Peter's prison, causing the chain to fall, the cell-door to open, and the light of heaven to gladden (Acts xii. 7). Then, the beloved absent, themselves, have a claim to be heard from the silent Land, rebuking the tears that would weep a premature departure. Many a Patroclus of Iliad fame is taken from us, regarding whom it may be said, "that in the very thick of the fight the God darkened his eyes, dashed down his shield, loosed his corslet, and shattered his spear!" But for their sakes let the bright epitaph be sufficient—"*His work was done.*" Yes, I repeat, "*for their sakes*" every redundant, unsubmissive sigh should be suppressed. It is a fine resolve to live for them and their memories—to seek to perpetuate in our homes what *they* would have liked: to become heirs to whatever in their lives was worthy. Above all, to rise to the consciousness and conviction that for them the departure was "far better":—

"Sorrow vanquished, labour ended, Jordan passed."

Nay, more, by a wise provision, they may have been possibly "taken away from the evil to come." Their pure hearts to be vexed no more with the rough ways, the strain and stress of life. They have vanished in the azure of the midday sky, before the lowering stormclouds of the afternoon have set in. Let us bless God for the brief loan; and though but a negative comfort, and subordinate to loftier themes of solace, let us feel with our great poet and mental analyst :—

"'Tis better to have loved and lost,
Than never to have loved at all."

God *may* have, assuredly He has, other ministries in store—higher, better. The thought ought to calm the grief of many a parent,—"The Lord hath need of him" (Mark xi. 3). He, the great Giver and Father, "needs" that the earthly services be transferred to the realms of the glorified.

"Think, when some sunny spot in those bright fields
Needs the fair presence of an added flower,
Down sweeps a starry angel in the night;
At morn the rose has vanished from our bower."
H. B. Stowe.

Then, afflicted one, do not fail to ponder, as an essential part of the "mercy," the result of bereavement on your own soul. Can you not well lift it out of the category of "judgment," if it has been

the means of more closely linking you by a golden chain to heaven? How often have the voices of the departed stolen down in the soft whisper of celestial love, saying, in the words of the Apocalyptic vision—"Come up hither!" That sorrow and severance have given you a new interest in the "Better Country," flooding your horizon, as never before, with dreams of your loved ones there. As a Christian poet in one of his elegies puts it :—

"'Tis something to a heart like mine,
To think of Thee as loving yet;
To feel that such a light as Thine
Could not in utter darkness set."

And not only your departed, but the God of your departed is no more the dim abstraction He so long was; but the living, loving Father, binding together the Church of earth and the Church of the glorified. Adore the great Chastener, if you have been led with greater fervency to sing that "Excelsior"-song which has elevated and invigorated many a Faint-heart :—

"Nearer my God to Thee—
Nearer to Thee,
E'en though it be a cross
That raiseth me;
Still all my song shall be,
Nearer my God to Thee—
Nearer to Thee!"

"Whoso is wise, and will observe these things,

even they shall understand *the lovingkindness of the Lord*" (Psalm cvii. 43).

God give to every mourner the consoling assurance that these *judgments* are really, if the broken heart would believe it, *mercies* in disguise. It is thus He disciplines you. "The Lord is known by the *judgment* He executeth," "Zion shall be redeemed with *judgemnt*." The hardiest trees are not reared in hot-houses, but where they can battle with wind and tempest—"moored in the rifted rock." The best seamanship is nurtured and displayed not in land-locked harbours, but out amid the buffeting waves—the midnight storm and darkness. This is the history of many a voyager on the sea of life, recognising alike "mercy and judgment" and the great hereafter for which they are conjointly training him :—

"There was a soul on eve autumnal sailing,
Beyond the earth's dark bars,
Toward the land of sunsets never paling,
Towards heaven's sea of stars.
* * * * *
"The glooms and gleams, the calmness and the strife,
Were death behind him, and before him, life."

Bishop Alexander.

Leave to God your unknown future. Only trust Him that when new trials overtake you, He will not suffer them to be without alleviations. "He stayeth His rough wind in the day of His

east wind." Glorify Him, meanwhile, by calm submission; looking forward to the hour when your present wavering wills will be entirely merged and absorbed in His; when our motto-verse will no longer be needed; when it will require to be re-cast; Judgment will cease to be spoken of together with Mercy. The song of the wilderness will become, with unfaltering note, the song of eternity;—"O give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good; for His *mercy* endureth *for ever*!" Then at least it will be acknowledged, what cannot be owned or discerned now, that mercy and judgment have formed the varying threads, sombre and brilliant, in the heavenly embroidery which is being weaved,—both needed to produce the harmonious whole. When the garment is completed, here is the description of the perfect Church in the presence of her King, and of each individual member:—"Upon Thy right hand did stand the queen in vesture of gold, *wrought about with divers colours*" (Psalm xlv. 10, Prayer Book Version).

"AND IT SHALL COME TO PASS IN THAT DAY, THAT THE LIGHT SHALL NOT BE WITH BRIGHTNESS AND WITH GLOOM: BUT IT SHALL BE ONE DAY WHICH IS KNOWN UNTO THE LORD; NOT DAY AND NOT NIGHT: BUT IT SHALL COME TO PASS THAT AT EVENING TIME THERE SHALL BE LIGHT" (R.V.).

TWENTY-NINTH DAY.

EVERLASTING LIGHT AND UNCHANGING LOVE.

"The Lord went before them by night in a pillar of fire."

"Thy sun shall no more go down ; neither shall thy moon withdraw itself: for the Lord shall be thine everlasting light, and the days of thy mourning shall be ended."—ISA. lx. 20.

"Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever."—HEB. xiii. 8.

THE first of these verses speaks of Heaven. The Pillar of the desert ceases to shine, in its symbolic or sacramental form, when earth's wilderness wanderings terminate; but only to be rekindled with more effulgent, diviner permanence: —"The Lord shall be thine everlasting light." A glory not provisionary—temporary,—through human infirmity and human tribulation at times blurred and obscured:—no transient meteor-blaze, but "as the stars for ever and ever." Yes, in the midst of deepest sorrow, the words remove our thoughts from the fugitive present to the bliss of an endless future; above all to God Himself, "our exceeding joy." Present vicissitude, partial light, restricted knowledge, are contrasted with undimmed radiance,—"the glass darkly" exchanged for "face to face." The unreached ideals of life at last are attained. The weary soul is rocked asleep in the peace of Paradise: "There remaineth therefore a rest for the people of God!"

Reader, your experience is now very different; it is that of setting suns and waning moons and

expunged stars. You never dreamt of this blight and ruin of your dearest earthly hopes. Many preachers and soothsayers read in your hearing homilies on the transience of life, the brief and uncertain tenure of its blessings, the suddenness and certainty of death. You deemed that all this might be true in the case of others, but you put the unwelcome—the seeming impossible theme far from yourself. Your inward comment was that of the doubters in Ezekiel's days—"Ah, Lord God! doth he not speak parables?" (Ezek. xx. 49). "To-morrow shall be as to-day and much more abundant." In such supposed immunity from trial you are now sternly undeceived. The enduring column of granite has been suddenly rent to its base; the life-dream vanished.

Vividly does Wordsworth describe what human pillars are, to which we have looked for heart and hope, guidance and permanency:—

> "Which when they should maintain themselves aloft
> Want due consistence: like a pillar of smoke
> That with majestic energy from earth
> Rises, but, having reached the thinner air,
> Melts and dissolves and is no longer seen!"

The hour does gradually come when a better Pillar discloses itself. Time and submission do their gracious work; and you are slowly led to turn from a vain brooding over the temporary

and the perishable, to the enduring and eternal. Sweetly does the thought of the Home that knows no change come to brighten these desolating earthly memories, taking you away from the tabernacle that has been "dissolved," to the inheritance "incorruptible, undefiled, unfading in the heavens."

Turn we now to the second, the collateral verse which we have deemed it well to link with the other. It is a revelation of the immutable Saviour, "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever." Not only the promise of His glorified presence in the world of everlasting light ("the Lamb is the Light thereof"), but with us *now*—leading us in the wilderness "all the night with a light of fire." How the "love beyond a brother's" steals into the crevices of the shattered earthly home and heart! He is "the same"—the same in every human experience, in joy and in sorrow, in youth and in age, in poverty and in wealth, amid marriage chimes and funeral bells. Whether the path of life be draped with flowers or strewn with cypresses, His voice of unchanging and unchangeable faithfulness rings its echoes,—"Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world" (Matt. xxviii. 20). Who, that know what the hour of bereavement is, have not at times conjured the thought of the spirits of departed friends hovering

over them—unseen presences as of angel-forms, peopling dreams by night, and consecrating haunts by day—the invisible companions still of the pilgrimage. As the gates of the morning open, in the hush of eventide, at the holy table of communion, or at the hour of solemn prayer, they seem to reveal themselves! This, after all, is only a pleasing possibility. It may be nothing better than a fond phantasm and illusion. We cannot tell. Not so is it with *Him*. He is ever with us; and never so close to us as in the deep midnight of grief; keeping tryst in the house of sorrow and the chamber of death; whispering to the aching ear and the aching soul His own lullaby of assured peace and unforgetting love—"Come unto Me, ye heavy-laden ones, and I will give you rest."

And He is still "that same Jesus." Changed indeed in His outward condition. The once Man of Sorrows—the Pilgrim of pilgrims is now seated on His throne wearing a glorified humanity. But His heart knows no change. To use words I have elsewhere written, but which are appropriate to the present volume:—

"On the return of Moses to the spot in the Sinai desert, the bush which he first saw burning with fire was probably visible no more. He would look for it in vain. But the sacred flame in which it

was formerly enveloped still lived in the spiral column which rose up before him by night. Christ in His human nature—Christ, the lowly bush of the desert—"the tender plant"—"the root out of a dry ground,"—Christ in His humiliation, "manifest in the flesh," we can see no more. But the Pillar of Fire remains. The Invisible Redeemer, touched with the feeling of our infirmities and sorrows, still lives and loves" (*The Shepherd and His Flock*, p. 85).

Do you remember His last revelation of Himself to a trembling, terror-stricken soul? It was, above all, as *the Man*. His words *from the throne*—emanating from a light "above the brightness of the sun," were not, "I am the Son of God," but "I am Jesus of *Nazareth*" (Acts xvii. 8). My crown and glorification have not obliterated My sympathies. I love to be known as once the dweller in a village of earthly Galilee—the Son of Mary, the Son of a carpenter, the Son of toil, the Son who knew well what the pulsation of a human soul is in its joys and above all in its agonies; who had the shadow of the cross projected every hour, every moment, in that lowly home. It is "Jesus of Nazareth," the fellow-Sufferer, who has the message waiting for thee, "I will show him how great things he must suffer for My name's sake!" Mourners, rejoice that that same Jesus has planned and ordered all

that befalls you. The crisis-hours—the tempestuous hours of existence are His appointment :—He your infallible Leader—Conductor, going before you, present with you in the storm and stress of battle ; the fiery Pillar during your desert marchings, when the sky is lowering above, and the simoom and tornado, in wild chaos, are making havoc of cherished encampments around. The words are as true now as they were of Israel's experience which they first described, "In all their afflictions He was afflicted, and *the Angel of His presence* saved them : in His love and in His pity He redeemed them ; and He bare them, and carried them all the days of old" (Isa. lxiii. 9).

He will be with you and yours in life and in its trials ; He will, above all, be with you and yours in the hour of death. "We put our foot through the darkness and feel the Rock beneath." You may have heard the saying of an aged Christian, when asked if he ever was troubled at the thought of death. "Yes," was his reply, "I tremble sometimes on the Rock, but *the Rock* cannot tremble under me."

"Whate'er may change, in Him no change is seen,
A glorious Sun that wanes not nor declines ;
Above the clouds and storms He walks serene,
And sweetly on His people's darkness shines.
All may depart, I fret not nor repine,
While I my Saviour's am, and He is mine."

Lyte.

In the only true, divine way of rising above your trial, seek to be able to avow in the sweet spirit of the same minstrel sufferer :—

> "Let good or ill befall,
> It must be good for me,
> Secure of having Thee in all,
> Of having all in Thee."

Let Him come in the place of your vanished dear ones. Make Him, as they once were, the centre of your life and being ; so that when earthly loves have been removed, you may be able to say with increasing confidence of the Brother in your nature who has filled the vacant niche in your heart-temple, "Lord, Thou knowest all things, Thou knowest that I love Thee." "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him" (2 Tim. i. 12). No desolating wave which has swept away your earthly moorings, can ever separate you from the love of Christ. "Such a friendship is sure and lasting, not merely held fast by the 'silver cord of life,' which may be snapped in a moment, but embedded (the Anchor) in the cleft of the Rock for ever" (*Hedley Vicars*). Thus, when the final night-shades gather, when life's working time is over, the curfew tolling for the putting out of the fires and the folding of the flocks,

happy ye who are ending the desert march with the glow of the unchanging Pillar, the days of your mourning ended, and the bells of heaven ringing their unceasing chime:—

"THERE SHALL BE NO NIGHT THERE."

"THE DARKNESS IS PAST, AND THE TRUE LIGHT NOW SHINETH."

THIRTIETH DAY

THE GLORIOUS RETURN.

"The Lord went before them by night in a pillar of fire."

"I will come again, and receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there ye may be also."—JOHN xiv. 3.

"My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning: I say, more than they that watch for the morning."—PSALM cxxx. 6.

WE have seen in the previous meditation that the column of flame,—the symbol of God's earthly presence in the midst of His Israel's darkest night, will, at the end of the journey, be superseded by a brighter, better radiance:—"They shall see His face. . . . And they need no light of lamp—(no fiery pillar), neither light of sun, for the Lord God shall give them light" (Rev. xxii. 4, 5. R.V.). He, who, to the future conductor of the Hebrew host, appeared "in a flame of *fire* out of the midst of the bush," has promised to come, (it matters little whether in Advent-glory or at the hour of death), to receive you unto Himself, that where He is, there ye may be also. That Coming speaks of the end of wilderness discipline, the termination of the varied prophetic figures,—floods and streams,—sand-storms and mocking mirage by day, drenching dews and chill by night. Every jagged rock, and flinty stone, and barren steppe, and savage cliff will be surmounted, every spiritual foe vanquished,—no more Egyptian plagues at the outset, no more Mount Hors and

Pisgahs with their mysterious sepultures at the close. No longer tried and trusted friends—venerable and trusted leaders missed from the ranks—the drift of oblivion covering their graves; but received by the King within His abiding "mansions" (John xiv. 2).

Moreover, admitted not to *His* presence only, but, as our motto-verse indirectly intimates, restored to our departed. His words are,—"that where I am, there YE (the re-gathered and in-gathered family of the new heaven and the new earth) may be also."

Gracious keepsake for His Church and people of every age! It was first spoken to His orphaned disciples in their hour of trouble (John xiv. 1). It is a legacy to the lonely and suffering and sorrow-stricken of all time. With the assurance of our loved ones safely landed above—and with the Pillar-cloud below in view, let us listen to a sweet singer:—

"Dear Friend, we will not drift too far
'Mid billows, fogs, and blinding foam,
To see Christ's beacon,—like a star
That guides us home.

* * * * *

"Thence onward, and for ever on,
To summits piled on summits bright,
The lost are found! And we have won
Their Land of Light."

L. Larcom.

Does not this "blessed hope," the glorious appearing (with His risen saints) of the great God our Saviour, reconcile you to your present night of gloom? Let your "Light of fire,"—in other words, your realised consciousness of a Saviour's presence and promises, be a pledge of "the full and perfect consummation." "The Admiral gave orders that the sails should be close reefed and the lead kept going, and that they should sail slowly, being afraid of breakers and shoals—feeling certain that the first gleam of daybreak would discover land under their bows" (Lamartine's *Columbus*). Give to that earthly picture a heavenly meaning. Go onwards, joyfully anticipating the assured daydawn; when all tender mysteries clouding your present outlook will be dispersed,—"My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning: I say, more than they that watch for the morning." Already the streaks may be seen on the horizon,—already the Advent-bell, like its type and symbol which in the Convent of the Sinai wilderness greets the travellers of the lower world, may be faintly heard in the distance. Welcome it as the summons to join the festal throng in the Eternal Sanctuary.

"Hail and farewell! We go our way;
Where shadows end, we trust in light;
The star that ushers in the night
Is herald also of the day."

God took His servant Elijah of old from the banks of Jordan up to Heaven "in a chariot of fire." This, child of sorrow, may possibly be also your experience,—the fires of suffering may follow you to the last; as if they would encompass the very chariot of salvation. That which is the recognised symbol of the Divine Presence is also the Bible symbol of "suffering affliction." Some are called, in a figurative sense, through flames to enter the gates of glory, "saved, yet so as *by fire*." It is enough to know that God is alike in the Pillar and in the Chariot. He leads you by this "light of *fire*," till night's deepest darkness is past and the morning-glory dawns. "This God is our God for ever and ever: He will be our Guide even unto death" (Psalm xlviii. 14). "He bringeth out to light the shadow of death" (Job xii. 22). "We went through fire and through water, but Thou broughtest us out into a wealthy place" (Psalm lxvi. 12). How Samuel Rutherford, the tried sufferer of a past century, responded to these and similar anticipations—"the joy that cometh in the morning!" His well-known words are thus rendered by a sympathetic hand:—

"The morning now is breaking,
The night will soon be o'er,
I am kneeling on the threshold,
My hand is on the door.

"I am longing for the Master
To bid me rise and come,
To the glory of His presence
To the gladness of His Home."

You are like the disciples of old on the Lake of Tiberias,—weary and disconsolate after their night of unrecompensed toil,—with sadder thoughts burdening your souls. But you can see, by the eye of faith, that unchanging Lord and Master standing on the heavenly, as He did then on the earthly shore,—with the banquet of love made ready, and addressing you with the same word of welcome,—"CHILDREN!"—"Where I am there ye may be also." "I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you." They are the words of the philosophic Paul Desjardins, one of the leaders, if not *the* leader of the higher thought in France in the present day:—"I discern at least by glimpses, the direction in which the light must break, and I am making towards it. Thus I live climbing through a steep and gloomy forest, towards the quarter from which the light comes: and it cannot deceive me, though the tangle of this complicated life may often hide it from me. What brings me nearer to it, is my going on." Yes, reader, your present midnight will inspire you with all the more ardent longing for the great Epiphany; waking within you

the slumbering heart-chords,—"Let me go, for the day breaketh!" "Make haste, my Beloved! Be Thou like to a roe or to a young hart upon the mountain of spices!"

"A little while for patient vigil keeping,
To face the storm, to wrestle with the strong,
A little while to sow the seed with weeping,
Then bind the sheaves, and sing the Harvest Song:

* * * * *

"A little while to keep the oil from failing;
A little while faith's flickering lamp to trim;
And then, the Bridegroom's coming footsteps hailing,
To greet His advent with the bridal hymn!"

"IN THE MORNING WATCH THE LORD LOOKED THROUGH THE PILLAR OF FIRE."

THIRTY-FIRST DAY.

THE BORDER RIVER.

"The Lord went before them by night in a pillar of fire."

"Behold, the ark of the Covenant of the Lord of all the earth passeth over before you into Jordan."—JOSH. iii. 11.

"And the king said unto him, Come thou over with me, and I will feed thee with me in Jerusalem."—2 SAM. xix. 33.

THE theme of this meditation may seem a step backward from the preceding; but I have purposely retained it as an appropriate one with which to close our volume.

The wilderness Pillar was undeviating in its guidance to the end. This "palladium" of the Hebrew host never failed in "giving light by night to these" till Jordan was reached.

We can picture it as it moved silently, majestically through the hills of Moab,—from upland to upland, from ridge to ridge, from valley to valley,—the pioneer of the mighty multitude, till its fiery splendour was seen for the last time. It had for forty long years shot up its column to the heavens. Now that its mission is accomplished, it ceases to shine. Its sacramental purpose is no more needed.

Yet, in another sense, it was *more* needed than ever. If the visible symbol be removed, is there no guarantee for further Divine guidance at this final crisis-hour? When the river,—the arrowy river rushing through its gorges,—(for Jordan was

in full flood) was seen by the pilgrim tribes, the question must have naturally passed from lip to lip,—'How are we to cross the impetuous barrier?' Joshua calms their fears with the inspiring assurance, "Behold, *the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth* passeth over before you into Jordan."

Believer, with you also, in a true anti-typical sense, the border-river may now, or ere long, be within sight. For yourself,—(more possibly for some one near and dear to you) there is a gradual or near approach to the end of the pilgrimage. It is a new experience. In the words of Joshua uttered at the same historic hour, "Ye have not passed this way heretofore" (Josh. iii. 4). It is the night of nights—night in its deepest darkness. You may try to invent euphemisms to dim and mitigate the gloom. It is nevertheless too surely, too awfully, the advent of the King of terrors. But if by grace served heir to the hopes and promises of the Gospel, that final passage is not traversed alone. Your Saviour-God (Joshua-Jesus) gives a corresponding assurance,—a better counterpart to that of Israel's commander,—"Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world" (Matt. xxviii. 20). "I am the first *and the last*" (Rev. i. 17). He will be true to His own covenant word, "Fear not, for I am with thee" (Isa. xliii. 2). Nay, more, not only does He conduct thee through

the stream, but He has Himself forded it. He knows what death and the grave are. He surrendered Himself to both, a voluntary captive. As He, the Incarnate Redeemer, the Divine Son of Man, has shared every wilderness experience of His people, so also this closing one. "Fear not: I am He that liveth and *was dead*" (Rev. i. 18). 'Can you dread,' He seems to say, 'to pass what I have encountered before you? With Me at your side you will go over dry shod. I have sanctified that hour of departure by My own. By My dying, the tomb has been transfigured. The gate of the grave has been made the gate of Heaven. I have "*abolished* death, and brought life and immortality to light!"

Believer! when the wilderness journey is about to end,—the better Canaan in sight, take God to witness, as did the Hebrew leader, "There hath not failed one word of all His good promise which He promised" (1 Kings viii. 56). "The light of fire" has been "*all* the night"; it has never dimmed. The faithfulness of Jehovah in the past is a pledge that He will not forsake you now. He who guaranteed special provision for the roughest part of the way (Deut. xxxiii. 25) will not forget you in the supreme hour of all. And when the guiding column fails, it is only to be superseded by "the glory that excelleth." You will not need the

Shadow where you have the Substance. You will not need the Satellites where you have the Sun. You will not need the Symbol where you have the all-glorious Reality. In the words of a recent theme of meditation—"God Himself shall be with them, and be their God." The invitation will then be true regarding every ransomed Israelite, in a far higher and nobler sense than when uttered to the aged Gilead chief by the brink of the literal Jordan,—"And the king said unto him, Come thou over with me, and I will feed thee WITH ME in Jerusalem."

Wondrous must have been the spectacle in that final hour of the Hebrew march—the goal of the desert wanderings. Already some had pitched their tents amid the acacias and palm-groves which studded the plain beyond, nigh to the Valley of Achor and the walls of Jericho. *But the safety of all was secured:* alike manhood in its strength; infancy in its feebleness; age in its decrepitude. The crossing was completed, doubtless with an *Epinikion*—a hymn of victory, similar to that which resounded on the Red Sea shores. Thus will it be with the army of the Redeemed—"the multitude which no man can number"! The Great Captain of Salvation will not only be their faithful Protector and Guide, but He will secure that however varied their bygone experience, there

will be a glorious meeting at last, as individuals and families, in "scenes beyond the flood,"—"the fields of living green." And so all Israel shall be saved (Rom. xi. 26).

Ye who are laid on beds of hopeless suffering, wait patiently amid the experiences of "death's dark night," till the sentinel footsteps are heard with tidings of the dawn. Pain, weakness, and languor, inseparable from the closing hour, may be yours, or that of those by whose couch you are keeping sacred watch. But though an enemy confronts you, it is the last enemy. It is but the boom of the breakers telling that the voyage is ending and the heavenly shore is at hand. St. John in Patmos, as he listened to the blast of trumpets and beheld the outpouring of vials,—in the hush and interlude of the great drama, heard a voice saying, "Write; *Blessed are the dead* which die in the Lord." Be it yours to subscribe the inspired beatitude. Feeling that "to die is gain," let this be your prayer and calm resolve,—"All the days of my appointed time, (or as rendered in the Revised Version, "of my warfare,") would I wait till my release come."

"Now we pitched our final tent,
The desert journey done:
The glorious hills of the Better Land
Gleam'd in the setting sun.

"The great and terrible river
Which we stood by night to view
Is left far off in the darkness,
For the Lord has brought us through."

Meanwhile, with memories of the goodness and mercy that have followed you all the days of your life,—a wilderness-vista of these, you can take up the great song of the ages, "the Song of the Valley," the most familiar of all inspired words, with their rhythmic music:—"I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me. Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me." It is, at best, but a brief transit. It is only the *shadow* of death. The substance,—the terribleness has been taken away by Him who announced in a note of prophetic triumph, "I will ransom them from the power of the grave, I will redeem them from death. O death, I will be thy plagues, O grave, I will be thy destruction." "With that staff," said an aged pilgrim, speaking of the revealed Christ of the Bible with His supporting grace,—"will I pass over this Jordan."

"My work is done; I lay me down to die.
Weary and travel-worn I long for rest.
Speak but the word, dear Master, and I fly,
A dove let loose, to nestle in Thy breast.

"It is enough, dear Master,—yea, Amen!
I will not breathe one murmur of reply.

Only fulfil Thy work in me, and then
Call me, and bid me answer, 'Here am I.'"
Bishop of Exeter.

O God, when the terminating hour of the pilgrimage comes to me, or comes to those I love, shine upon us through the flaming Pillar! I seek no other funeral torch but this. Let it prove what a lighthouse often is in "crossing the bar" of some earthly harbour, when friends are disclosed on the pier waving their welcome. Yes, the thought of reunion after long years of separation, will joyfully mingle with other supreme visions of the Home hereafter, and God will be found true to His word, "the God not of the dead but of the living."

"We must not doubt, or fear, or dread,
That love for life is only given,
And that the calm and sainted dead
Will meet unrecognised in Heaven;
But that which makes this life so sweet
Shall make eternal joy complete."

Was it a cheering thought to the Hebrews, that once on the Canaan side, their feet touched the land made sacred by the names of the patriarchs,—the pilgrim fathers of their nation sleeping in the not distant cave of Machpelah? What, O child of promise, will be your joy, when, the border-river left behind, you come not only to share the Presence of the King in Jerusalem, but also to recognise sainted

ones gone before you; and, as a member of the family of the glorified, *sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of Your Father*?

May the fugitive meditations of the foregoing pages carry with them a few balm-words of comfort to those who may stand much in need of such. Pausing once more under the Column of Fire:—or rather, with the last gleam of the Pillar reflected in the gloomy waters, and with our faces and footsteps turned to the City of the living God, let us sing the final, triumphant note,—"Death is swallowed up in VICTORY."

"AND THEY ALL PASSED OVER JORDAN BY MORNING LIGHT."

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